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The Kamikaze Pilots and Their Image in World War II

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I. Introduction

When we think of the kamikaze, there tends to be a set image that springs to mind, and while the image may vary slightly from person to person, the general characteristics remain the same: a young man with a mix of honor and recklessness, dying for the emperor without regard for his own life. This is the image of the kamikaze, and in my research and writing, I attempted to discern how much of it, if any, was true, and how the American media transmuted the reality of the kamikaze into the more widely accepted image.

A large part of this paper involves the idea of an image constructing a sense of reality, and how that reality can, in turn, become more accepted, more real, than the truth of the situation. The kamikaze pilots experienced this at the hands of American media. Historically, there were the kamikaze pilots, intelligent young men with a myriad of individual and personal reasons for their decision to join and remain in the kamikaze corps. However, the American media and thus the American public never perceived all of the different facets of the kamikaze pilots, the many depths and subtleties of their motivations and individual qualities. The kamikaze became an image in the American media, a word, an image and a concept the media then circulated to the public as a whole. And while that concept may have been related to or shown one side of the kamikaze, it was not entirely true. Regardless, it was the image America was most acquainted with, and thus became the one which

the American public accepted and believed. Once World War II had ended and the kamikaze program had ceased to function, the image continued to survive and circulate, and the American public placed their faith in their constructed image of the kamikaze.

An image, however, is mutable and dependent upon the perspectives that constructed it. As such, when the public opinion and perceptions of the kamikaze shifted, so did the overall image of the kamikaze. This accounts for the shifts we see in the image of the kamikaze during World War II, and with how disassociated the image became from reality. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11th the media labeled the hijackers as kamikaze, and in doing so, brought the image of the kamikaze suddenly into contrast and conflict with the reality of its historical precedent. After 9/11, there were immediate parallels drawn to Pearl Harbor, World War II, and the kamikaze pilots. The use of Pearl Harbor established a link between the events of 9/11 and the events of World War II, in an effort to use the image of the events of former to further guide and direct the public opinion of the latter. However, this equated the kamikaze and the 9/11 hijackers, shifting the image of one to meet the other. Over the course of World War II, the kamikaze pilots had been accorded a sense of respect by the American media, and yet image works both ways. To call the terrorists kamikaze was to call the kamikaze terrorists, an appellation that the remaining pilots themselves were not comfortable with. Because of the symbolic weight present in 9/11, the words used to discuss and refer to the event became incredibly important.

The shifting of reality to image is a complex change, and I further broke down the process in each of my respective chapters, using the four chapters establish a thematic and chronological timeline. As such, each of the chapters was constructed from a different research method and source type, which contributes to the style and content of each. The first two chapters, which deal primarily with the kamikaze pilots as individuals, are based heavily on first-person accounts left behind by the pilots themselves, a fairly large collection of diaries, journals, letters, and similar writings. This body of work has been collected in Japan and was accessible to the general public. Some of it has been compiled, along with the writings from other young Japanese soldiers who died in the war, into two popular collections, one of which, *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* (Listen to the Voices of the Sea) has been translated into English. These collections, as well as several others, formed the basis for my research on the pilots.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis and transformation of the kamikaze image in the American media. To this end, I traced the usage of the word “kamikaze” from its first appearances in World War II to the end of the 20th century, looking primarily at popular newspapers. The ways in which American media represented the kamikaze over the years affected the perceptions the American public had of them. The kamikaze pilots, being the boldest example of the Japanese military efforts during the war, bore the brunt of media coverage. They stood as symbols for the whole of Japan, and whatever the media did to their image was, by association, done to the image

of Japan. Through propaganda representations and articles from the media, we can track how the media drastically altered the public opinion of the kamikaze, and all of Japan, over the course of the war. Trends in image became the most important aspects of my research here, necessitating the examination of a broader period of time and a wider scope.

The fourth and final chapter of my paper deals with the perception of the kamikaze pilots and their image in the changed perspective of a post 9/11 society. While the analysis of the event itself relied on primary as well as secondary sources, this chapter depended on secondary sources more so than the other three. In speaking about the terrorists, I needed to discuss the principles of Islam and Al-Queda which guided them in their actions, and secondary sources helped me acquire a familiarity with the topic. The final chapter of my paper also deals with propaganda, the propaganda of images and words in newspapers as well as popular media. While less obvious than the posters and propaganda cartoons of World War II, the subtler media examples still carry a great deal of symbolic weight and importance.

In formulating preliminary ideas for my paper, several books were key. I initially based much of the direction for my work in dealing with the image of the kamikaze pilots as people on the guidelines laid down by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's book Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History. Ohnuki-Tierney's work looks at the same deconstruction of the kamikaze image into the reality of the pilots as individuals; she focuses on five pilots and bases her initial work on

an analysis of the books each of the pilots read. These reading lists, placed in the back of the book as appendixes, first attracted my interest in the subject. I became determined to learn more about the pilots upon seeing that Sasaki Hachiro, a kamikaze pilot, read not only the philosophies of Karl Marx but also the classic children's book A Little Princess.

While Ohnuki-Tierney's work served as a beginning, I soon found myself moving away from it as I became more and more concerned with the image and representation of the pilots. In this, John Dower's book War Without Mercy proved a good guide on the ways in which the American propaganda machine represented the Japanese during World War II.

Overall though, the most interesting and useful sources were the primary documents. In reading the wealth of material the pilots left behind, I began to know each of the pilots as individuals, which I felt was the only way to understand their motivations and emotions. Under the broad heading of "the kamikaze" their respective thoughts, feelings, and motivations become lost as they fade into the morass of their image. In separating them from that image and understanding the reality of the people who served and died in the kamikaze program, I could begin to realize the reality of the program itself.

II. Foundations of the Kamikaze Program

In mentioning the kamikaze pilots of World War II, we summon a host of images and ideas. Among the most common of these is the conception of the pilots as a corps comprised entirely of men willing, almost gladly, to die in the name of their country and for the sake of their emperor. We paint a picture of a soldier in a cockpit, ready to do his duty, piloting his plane into the deck of an American ship. He descends, screaming a patriotic maxim – *tenno heike banzai* – Long live the Emperor! – or something similar, and in his death, becomes something noble, something more than human.

There is another image, of course; that of the kamikaze pilots as fools, misled by the country and their military into dying for a war they could not win. They had no value attributed to their lives or the lives of others, and the military's cheap regard for human life allowed them a peace of mind whilst they threw away the lives of many men. They were fanatics and suicide bombers, starting a tradition of suicide attacks that terrorists would copy later in history to great effect.

These two images of the Special Attack Force stand as near opposites of each other. In acknowledging both of them as created images and not concrete truths, we can begin to understand the pilots were first and foremost a group of highly educated and intelligent young men, the brightest young minds of their country. They were patriots who possessed a strong sense of duty and personal honor and were at all times fully aware of the consequences

of their actions. No pilot in the corps expected to survive the war; they lived with that knowledge and understanding the best they could. Many of them did not think of the emperor in their last moments, or indeed, in any of the moments preceding their final sortie. They thought of their country, their families, and the futures available to both. With this perspective grounding us, we first examine the situations present at the inception of the kamikaze.

The battle of Midway was a pivotal point in the American and Japanese Naval operations in World War II. Prior to this, Japan had enjoyed a series of fantastic victories, a campaign that started at Pearl Harbor and swept across the western half of the Pacific. However, Midway, in many ways, broke Japan. The battle, staged at the Midway Atoll from June 4th to June 7th, 1942 was the turning point for the war. At this point, the Japanese forces had expanded to a wide net that covered the western half of the Pacific: at the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan had hoped to destroy key elements of the American fleet. Launching bombers and torpedo planes from six carrier ships, Japan's plan had been to disable to American fleet. However, in a stroke of fortune for the American fleet, the majority of the American aircraft carriers were able to escape the attack unharmed and functional.¹ The massive aircraft carriers served key functions in both the American and the Japanese military, symbols of power as well as essential weapons.

¹ Frank, Pat, and Joseph Daniel Harrington. Rendezvous at Midway: U.S.S. Yorktown and the Japanese Carrier Fleet. New York: John Day Co., 1967. 39.

In one battle, Japan lost four fleet carriers out of a total of six², a heavy cruiser and over 200 aviators: in other words, in the span of four days America had destroyed two-thirds of Japan's essential naval force. In comparison, the American forces lost a single carrier and one destroyer. This balancing of the military power on each side allowed America, for the first time, to truly move onto the offensive, halt Japan's forward advance and place the other country on the defensive. For over a year, this was the progression of the Pacific Campaign and the situation steadily worsened for Japan as America's power escalated. It is with this backdrop that the Japanese military created the kamikaze corps.

Influential Factors: History and Culture

The decision to form the corps was a calculated decision by Japanese military officials, brought on by a culmination of the effects of the war on Japan's military might: the American destruction of a great deal of Japan's fleet during the battle of Midway continued throughout the remaining two years, and by 1944 Japan was left with few options in regards to continuing the war: "Our air forces and naval forces were both inferior to those of the enemy. Extreme measures were called for. Kamikaze attacks were

² Japan lost the following carriers at Midway: Kaga, Akagi, Soryu, and Hiryu. Its two remaining functional carriers were named Zuikaku and Shokaku.

inevitable."³ While Inoguchi Rikihei⁴, one of the commanders in the Kamikaze corps, expressed his opinion on the situation boldly and without pretense, he was, in this instance, correct. After the devastation of their already inferior material resources, Japan resorted to utilizing the one resource it still had in abundance: soldiers.

The kamikaze program was a result of centuries of tradition and Japanese culture as well as the wartime circumstances. In localizing the creation of the kamikaze to the latter, we can isolate one time and place as critical to its founding: the 19th of October, 1944, in Mabalacat, a town on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Accordingly to this logic, the man responsible for the creation of the Special Attack Forces, (*tokubetsu kōgekitai*, or *Tōkkotai* as they were known in Japan) was Vice Admiral Ōnishi Takijiro, sent from Tokyo to assume command of the Japanese naval air force in the Philippines.⁵ The Pacific portion of World War II, unlike direct attacks opened on Okinawa and the main islands of Japan, was primarily a battle between the naval fleets of America and Japan. Because of this, Japan felt it would have to immobilize or destroy America's powerful aircraft carriers and destroyers in order to have any chance at survival. The aircraft carriers were seen as ships of great power, and after Midway, was an area in which Japan had yet to completely recover its strength. After discussing options, Ōnishi

³ Inoguchi, Rikihei, and Tadashi Nakajima. *The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in World War II*. Trans. Roger Pineau. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1958. xiii.

While the account written by Rikihei and Nakajima, two commanding officers in the Kamikaze Corps, contains a strong subjectivity in regards to certain events – most notably those concerning the pilots themselves, as we will examine later – their opinion here on the situation of the Japanese Naval and Air Forces is valid.

⁴ Japanese names in this text are given in the traditional format, last name first.

⁵ Ibid. 4.

forwarded his proposal: "In my opinion, there is only one way of assuring that our meager strength will be effective to a maximum degree. That is to organize suicide attack units composed of Zero fighters armed with 250-kilogram bombs, with each plane to crash dive into an enemy carrier..."⁶

Ōnishi, his superiors and subordinates, and the pilots had been introduced to and inundated with several important and key ideals and principles of Japanese culture. Over the course of their lives to date, these men had been surrounded by these ideals, and thus integrated them to a degree into their own worldview. Key among these ideals was the samurai mystique, a principle which the kamikaze program as a whole as well as the individual pilots within it all assimilated to greater or lesser degrees. This was; however, one of many elements that affected the program and the men within it; as educated and well read individuals, many of the pilots were familiar with a range of philosophies, including, prominently, Marxism. While the importance of the samurai mystique and its effect on the kamikaze cannot be forgotten, it was not the single driving factor behind the motivations or actions of the pilots. The legacy of the samurai is long, but foremost among its literature is Hagakure, a treatise on samurai ethics, morals, and conduct written by Yamamoto Tsunetomo over a period of years in the seventeenth century, finally collected through correspondence and circulated in 1716. The period of warring states, where the samurai class fulfilled an active military role, ended with the battle of Sekigahara and unification of Japan in 1600. Thus, when Tsunetomo wrote Hagakure and the work subsequently achieved

⁶ Ibid. 7.

popularity the samurai had already spent a good century transforming from warriors to bureaucrats. Because of this Hagakure, despite being a basis for the samurai mindset of later-day Japan, was not so much a working, pragmatic guide as an romantic reminiscence on past glories, an idealized view.

However, what concerns us is not the reality but the idea of the image; the image is what people believe in, and that belief lends it power, a concept we will see repeated with the image of the kamikaze themselves.

Many of the major points of Hagakure echo the principles of the kamikaze corps, and furthermore offer some explanation and motivation for them. The oft-celebrated and dramatized willingness of a samurai (or, later, a pilot) to die is not indicative of any inherent devaluing or disregard for their lives or the lives of others, merely an assertion that there are a great many things more important than one's life, and to die for any of those is not a bad death: "The Way of the samurai is found in death...not having attained our aim and continuing to live is cowardice. To die without gaining one's aim *is* a dog's death and fanaticism. But there is no shame in this."⁷ This sentiment of attaining one's aim in death is better than a continued failure to do so in life is one the pilots themselves later echoed.

Another essential concern of Hagakure is the critical importance of loyalty in the crafting of the samurai as ideal retainers to their lords: "if a warrior makes loyalty and filial piety one load, and courage and compassion another, and carried these twenty-four hours until his shoulders wear out, he

⁷ Tsunetomo, Yamamoto. Hagakure: the Book of the Samurai. Trans. William Scott Wilson. Tokyo: Kodansha America, Inc., 1979. 17.

will be a samurai."⁸ Of note is that when the work discusses the requisite aspects of obeisance, the author divides them in two: loyalty to the family and another implied loyalty to one's lord. The fledging Meiji government found the latter most useful, but the implications of the former have more importance to the principles of the pilots themselves. Hagakure stressed loyalty as a key component of a samurai, as integral to his composition as anything else.

The Meiji Revolution changed much of Japan, including the samurai class and ideal; before the Meiji Revolution of 1868 the samurai were a concrete social class, solid and exclusive. One could aspire to the lofty ideals of the samurai, but the criteria for actually being a samurai were far more concrete, inflexible and defined by birth: it was a class one had to be born into, and thus a peasant farmer with the noblest of intentions, full of loyalty and the willingness to die for his lord was still just a peasant farmer. However, Japan's social class system was restructured in the wake of the Meiji Revolution, and the samurai as a class were abolished entirely: lacking a concrete social class to inhabit, where then could the idea of the samurai go? It was far too valuable a motif to lose entirely, as the fledgling Meiji government and society realized. The ideals of the samurai, and the loyalty they were expected to embody was something the Meiji government put to work. While in the past each samurai had a distinct loyalty to his daimyo, or feudal lord, the Meiji government also tackled the issue of consolidating all of these varied and nearly independent provinces of Japan into one country,

⁸ Ibid. 95.

under one emperor. The loyalty each samurai was meant to have for his lord was transferred onto the emperor, making him, in effect, the daimyo to the entirety of the populace. Furthermore, samurai ideas were concepts that every single citizen of Japan could stand behind – a standard to pull together all the peoples of Japan, to truly create the concept of being 'Japanese.' It is to this effect that Inazo Nitobe's work entitled Bushido, became critical. In Bushido Nitobe is frank in regards to the fate of bushido and the warrior code and class: "They are not dead, these ghosts, the spirits of our warlike ancestors....Scratch a Japanese of the most advanced ideas, and he will show a samurai."⁹ Bushido stood as a representation of the Meiji government's efforts to use the samurai spirit to unify Japan. The samurai image had other practical applications beyond that; however, most touching upon the ideals of loyalty and fealty.

That the samurai motif affected the leaders and founders of the corps is evident and Ōnishi's actions following the war illustrate this devotion to and internalization of the idea. In the early morning hours of August 17th, 1945, Ōnishi took his own life, ritually disemboweling himself and leaving behind a message to the members of the corps:

To the spirits of members of the special-attack corps:
I express my deep gratitude to you who have fought so well.
Ever convinced of final victory, you fell gallantly as human bullets.
But that conviction finally had not been fulfilled. With my death I
desire to make atonement to the souls of my former subjects and to
members of their bereaved families.
I also have a message to the young men at large. If my death
should prove to be any admonition to you to be cautious and endure
all hardships, always aware that any ill-advised conduct will invite

⁹ Nitobe, Inazo. Bushido: The Warrior's Code. New York: Ohara Publications, Inc., 1979. 111.

disastrous consequences, thereby following His Imperial Majesty's will, I shall be very happy.

In your patience and endurance never lose your qualities as Japanese. You are the treasure of the nation. Attend properly to your peacetime circumstances, and maintaining steadfastly the spirit of the special-attack corps, do your utmost for the revival of the Japanese race and for world peace.¹⁰

Ōnishi clearly expressed his emotions and thoughts through his last words and actions: in committing ritual *hara-kiri* he refused medical attention or any other assistance when discovered and spent twelve hours in what must have been excruciating pain before he finally died.¹¹ In this he maintained a devotion to the ideals and essence of the samurai, the same ideals he wished to instill in his pilots. While *hara-kiri* is undoubtedly one of, if not the, most dramatic gestures of homage to the samurai image possible, it is also a reappearing motif in Japanese history.

The samurai motif, strongly woven into the culture of that time, had a clear effect on the decisions of the commanding officers, though it was, of course, one of many factors influencing them. Their commanding officers were touched by the samurai mentality: Ōnishi's writings, poems, and actions demonstrate his devotion and connection to this ideal: "Blossoming today, tomorrow scattered; / Life is like a delicate flower; / Could one expect the fragrance to last forever?"¹² The root and importance of the cherry blossom imagery alone is enough to comprise a great length of study, and indeed, forms one of the major bases for Ohnuki-Tierney's work on the kamikaze

¹⁰ "Kamikaze Founders Takes His Own Life." New York Times, 18 Aug 1945.

¹¹ Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Ed. Diego Gambetta. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 32.

¹² *Ibid.* 34.

ethos. From the beginning of the conception of the samurai image, the fleeting nature of cherry blossoms, their swift and perfect blooming followed by the tree quickly shedding the flowers, was integrated into the entire mythos.

Samurai of the Skies: the Military Integrates *Bushido*

While the samurai mystique and like stories of Japanese culture exerted a powerful influence, that was all that they were. The lives of these men were influenced, although not determined or directed, by the samurai ideal.¹³ The reasoning behind the actual pilots of the corps is a great deal more complex: they needed to each find within themselves a reason compelling enough to die for. To 'die nobly as a samurai would' was less a motivation than a guideline for life and attitude in the corps: "I tried to remember that food was unimportant. Really, it was one's attitude that counted. After all, hadn't the early samurai been able to go without food for days?"¹⁴ Through these comparisons to the samurai and heroes of stories of the past, the pilots were able to further motivate themselves and maintain

¹³ In Kamikaze, Kuwahara's journal of his time in the military, first in basic training and then in flight school, the author is harsh and unflinching in his portrayal of the military and the abuses all recruits received on a regular basis: they range from beatings to severe exercise to extreme censorship of materials to meager, sub-standard food. All of these he describes in great detail and with what appears to be little personal bias: the journal is a record of his experiences, his life as he lived it. Consequently, this makes his reference to the samurai; however oblique and done during dinner in the cafeteria, all the more important, as the idea and what it embodied was important enough to him that he thought of it, and furthermore, integrated into his own self on such a level that comparisons to the samurai ordeal and hardship as a way to bolster his own morale and determination are subconsciously done.

¹⁴ Kuwahara, Yasuo. Kamikaze. Trans. Gordon T. Allred. New York: Ballantine Books, 1957. 88.

morale in the program. They incorporated it into themselves and into the spirit of the corps, as the following song of the kamikaze corps illustrates:

As we are born aloft as samurai of the skies,
Our eyes ever searching for signs of battle,
See how our outstretched arms carry us forward
Like divine wings.

Here we are – comrades of the sacred land of the
rising sun!
Enemy ships are sighted – loud alerts are sounded.
Let us drive them beneath the waves!

Men of the cherry blossom squadrons – rally to the
charge!
As we look down at our base spread below us,
Through the flow of tears that fills up our hearts,
We can see a fading glimpse of hands waving
farewell!

Now is the time for our final, plunging blow.
We are ready to spill our blood, oh so red.
See how we dive towards the ships in the seas of the
south!

The cool waves will console our departed spirits
And some day we will be reborn as cherry blossoms
In the garden of Yasukuni Jinja.¹⁵

This song demonstrates the level of integration of the samurai ideal into the Japanese military. Of course, as a military song, there is a certain propagandistic bent which much be considered, but as that itself is generated from the mindset and point of view of the men of the corps, it too is important to consider when analyzing this song. Readily apparent are both the references to the kamikaze being 'samurai of the sky' and 'cherry blossom squadrons.' The image of cherry blossoms was reinforced most literally in the

¹⁵ Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Ed. Diego Gambetta. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 33.

Yasukuni shrine, in Tokyo, is the shrine which honors all of Japan's war dead.

kamikaze corps, as often pilots would leave for the final sortie with branches cut from flowering cherry trees attached to their planes or held inside, presented as gifts. This is seen vividly in one of the most famous images of the kamikaze, where a plane taxiing on the runway, turning to begin the initial stages of take off, is waved goodbye to by a group of young girls, all brandishing cherry blossoms branches.

Within the poem lie other references that tell of the propaganda of the day. Of note are the constant referrals to the eagerness of the kamikaze to die. As we will examine later, the leaders and officers of the corps touted the purportedly volunteer nature of the kamikaze, and the idea that these young men willingly decided to die became a large part of the overall image of the corps. There are, of course, other factors that affected their decisions to register with the special attack forces, and tales of harsh conditions, beatings, and peer pressure abound. However, this morale-inspiring song mentions only their eagerness, scouting for new battles, anticipating when and which assignment will be their final sortie. The entire image is very idyllic: hands waving farewell, hearts swelling with glad and righteous tears, dying nobly whilst driving the enemy ship to ruin. Of course, the song makes no mention of any of the actual realities of life in the corps, or the kamikaze's incredibly high miss rate of attacks; most planes, with poor steering capabilities and piloted by inexperienced young men, most kamikaze pilots missed their targets: the actual hit rate for pilots was under ten percent.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: the Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973. 305.

A great deal of the moral, mental and sociological conditioning present in the pilots can also be traced back to the literature and materials with which the pilots were conditioned, materials which expressed the mythological roots of Japan. There is the apparent case and cause of emperor worship, revering the emperor as a living God and dying for him. While the idea of dying nobly for the emperor is frequently referenced and connected to the kamikaze, there is little evidence to support the notion of the pilots felt this way. Rather, much of the writings left behind by the pilots do not cite emperor worship at all, and those that do do not speak of it as something worth dying for. Putting the emperor issue aside, the inundation and absorption of other cultural heroes of Japan were meaningful to the corps members.

The navy inundated all of its sailors with the need for self-sacrifice and utter devotion to the emperor, a message infiltrated through nearly every communication medium available to them. Nowhere, however, is this more apparent than through analysis of the anthem of the Japanese Navy, "Across the Sea" or "Umi Yukaba."

Across the sea, water-drenched corpses;
 Across the mountains, grass-covered corpses.
 We shall die by the side of our lord,
 We shall not look back.¹⁷

Through dissection of the imagery found within the anthem, line by line, we can clearly see the depths present in the seemingly-simple message of emperor worship. The first line is a clear reminder of the probable fate of any

¹⁷ Senso: the Japanese Remember the Pacific War: Letters to the Editor of Asahi Shinbun. Trans. Beth Cary. Ed. Frank Gibney. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995. 37.

sailor in the Japanese navy, a corpse, bloated with water, died and buried at sea. It is hardly an uplifting image, and suggests sailors should not expect the honor of a proper burial or cremation. The second line ties together the mission of the navy with that of the army. Although this is the anthem of the navy, the reference to "grass-covered corpses" serves as a clear reminder of the fact that sailors can and should expect death to come at any time, be it on land or at sea, and that soldiers of the army expect and await the same fate as sailors. It is a strong unifying image, that the men of the army and navy together are willing to sacrifice their lives for their country.

The last two lines of this anthem deal most directly with emperor worship. Here we see the desire of the navy (and by proxy and parallel reasoning, the army) to imbue the sense of individual devotion to the emperor. Despite the need for the military to function as a unit, each man was expected to develop his own sense of personal, individualistic emperor worship. He would carry this with him when he died, and thus, no matter what distance separated them geographically, he would be with the emperor, his emperor, when he died. The last line cements the imagery, painting the epic picture of men boldly going off to die, without a second regard for their own lives.

The anthem utilizes death to cement the image of a unified, devoted force, but interestingly, it uses the death and sacrifice of Japanese sailors instead of the death of the enemy forces. This is considerably counter to the messages that the American Navy used at the time, and uses to this day.

"Anchors Aweigh," the still unofficial anthem to the American Navy not only

draws upon lyrics which suggest competition with the army, but also popularizes lyrics exulting in the Navy's victory and the death of their opponent.¹⁸ This is a difference of opinion and ingrained mindset that we see repeated frequently, from the difference in military anthems to statements made by American generals.¹⁹ The opinions expressed by American generals and soldiers was that it is far better to kill your opponent than die yourself. The idea of victory as dominance over an external enemy is in direct contrast to the ideal displayed by the Japanese Naval anthem - that of victory over

¹⁸ Charles A. Zimmerman composed "Anchors Aweigh" in 1906, with lyrics written by Alfred Hart Miles. A third verse was added by Royal Lovell, Naval Academy class of 1926, and the song was gradually and uniformly adopted as the navy's anthem. The historic lyrics read thus:

Stand Navy down the field, sails set to the sky.
 We'll never change our course, so army you steer shy.
 Roll up the score, Navy, Anchors Aweigh.
 Sail Navy down the field and sink the Army, sink the Army Grey.

Get underway, Navy, Decks cleared for the fray,
 We'll hoist true Navy Blue, So Army down your Grey.
 Full speed ahead, Navy; Army heave to,
 Furl Black and Grey and Gold and hoist the Navy, hoist the Navy blue.

Blue of the Seven Seas; Gold of god's great sun
 Let these our colors be Till all of time be done,
 By Severn shore we learn Navy's stern call:
 Faith, courage, service true, With honor over, honor over all.

The song originated as an athletic anthem, but was adopted for battle, wherein the lyrics changed. Their present iteration are most interesting, with lyrics such as:

Stand Navy out to sea
 Fight our battle cry:
 We'll never change our course
 So vicious foes steer shy.
 Roll out the T.N.T
 Anchors Aweigh
 Sail on to victory
 And sink their bones to Davey Jones, hooray!

¹⁹ Most notably here General George Patton, a general of the European front in World War II, who is quoted as saying: "No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his." He reiterates this opinion in another well-known quote: "The objective of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his."

one's own selfish ideas and intents, expressed through complete and utter selfless devotion and sacrifice.

The selfless image of the kamikaze is heavily connected to the allegedly volunteer nature of the corps. There are different opinions and narratives which debate the extent to which the kamikaze corps was truly volunteer. Some accounts detail a training system rife with peer pressure and near-constant beatings, extreme physical exercise, severe censorship and pressuring of the pilots into their missions. Other accounts; however, portray a far more idyllic view of the corps, with brave and bold men going off – if not gladly, then at least willingly – to die for their country. As needs must, we consider both, despite the fact that the two representations of training appear at times directly counter to each other.

There are several diaries and other narratives that detail the harsh regime present in the kamikaze training program, and discuss the physical and psychological stresses superior officers placed on each and every recruit. However, this is not the only account of training: Nagatsuka Ryuiji, another trainee in the kamikaze program, took great affront to the very implication that beatings took place during training. In his own journal, he did write of being beaten once, but the incident is passed off as something with very little effect on his physical and mental state, and his commanding officer speaks to him personally after the event. He describes how whatever beatings may occur in training are a necessary evil to foster strength in individual recruits and companionship and camaraderie amongst recruits as a whole. As

Nagatsuka relates the event, there is a sense of fondness in his voice, as if his commander has done him a great service here. He is beaming as he speaks to his commanding officer: the fault, as Nagatsuka sees it, is entirely his own: "No resentment against him. The blow had been a punishment for my fault, that was all there was to it."²⁰ He sees it as a proper consequence for his poor actions and conduct, and nothing more.

When addressing the other accounts of severe beatings in training, Nagatsuka becomes argumentative, nearly livid. He speaks about the accounts – of beatings and other hardships – as a "twisting of facts [which is] inadmissible."²¹ While he does not comment on what occurred amongst members of the infantry, he states that, in his experience, such barbarism never existed in the air force. While the picture Nagatsuka paints was not idyllic, his commanding officers were cast in an almost extraordinarily forgiving light: any punch or blow they bestow is for the betterment of the recruits, to help them develop into the kind of men who will survive in combat. Furthermore, they displayed a great deal of gentleness toward the recruits; Nagatsuka's officer, after speaking to him about the blow he gave him, rewarded the young pilot with a bag of biscuits, and furthermore ensured that all trainees were given at least one day of leave a month.

²⁰ Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: the Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973., 52.

²¹ Ibid. 52.

Kuwahara Yasuo, another kamikaze pilot, paints a very different picture of both basic training and training for the kamikaze.²² His training regime was harsh: the initiation all of the basic recruits involved the officers beating all men with baseball bats labeled to represent the national spirit of Japan that must infuse each and every pilot. Their initiation to basic training is hardly the last time they faced such brutality: indeed, they were beaten again and again, watched carefully for any signs of weakness, any way in which they could be singled out and thus further reprimanded. Kuwahara describes a training regime of brutal, punishing exercise which pushed each man to, and often past, the point of physical collapse; constant beatings from his officers; strict censorship of all reading materials and writings; verbal abuse of increasing severity; and an embargo on any food being brought in from family members. One man, when caught with food his visiting family members sneaked in to him, was reprimanded and beaten severely and his food confiscated. The recruits give their commanding officers nicknames that represent the recruits opinion of them: exaggerations based upon physiognomy and lacking in compassion or friendship; Kuwahara's flight school instructor is referred to as the "grasshopper" and they clearly revile the man, performing any number of pranks ranging from the simple and harmless to the more elaborate and harmful.

Kuwahara's account also detailed a great deal of camaraderie among the recruits, particularly developed in response to the harsh treatment provided

²² Kuwahara, Yasuo. Kamikaze. Trans. Gordon T. Allred. New York: Ballantine Books, 1957. 38.

at the hands of their commanding officers. The trainees banded together to enact their pranks, and to try to survive and endure the harsh regime enacted by their superior officers. Such unification was a powerful motivational force in battle, and the officers would have endeavored to foster it among the recruits. The brotherhood found among units in the military can drive men to do great (and suicidal) acts in the hope of helping their comrades, and while the kamikaze battle was not one that heavily favored such actions – being a war of single-fighter combat in the air, and not troops of men fighting together – but it would still have been a strong force with the recruits.

Other pilots elaborated upon this harsher conception of training camp. One pilot, Sugimura Yutaka, who was twenty-one upon entering training, detailed how he was told to close himself off from gentler, more sensitive pursuits, as they were unbecoming a soldier's way. He reflected on how "our senses have already become dry and unnurtured [sic], and my own feeling is that our hearts are getting rough as well."²³ Every day his superior officers instructed him in the ways and manners befitting the soldier he was to become, and in Sugimura's eyes these ways destroyed other parts of him. In the honing of his soldierly abilities, other areas that comprised him as a person, as an individual, were either ignored or killed. Indeed, he reflects that becoming a fine soldier seems to come at the cost of being a fine person, an individual. While he is also criticized for any lapses in his duty with harsh scolding and

²³ Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 218.

beatings, the effects on his mental state, the constant stresses of being defined by the soldier-mold, appeared to have a far greater impact upon him.

Sugimura writes that there certainly are intrinsic differences between the American method of training soldiers and the Japanese, but does not immediately claim one method as the superior of the other. Instead, there are faults to each: Japan's traditional navy suppresses individuality and creates, by the author's reckoning, a number of automaton soldiers. Furthermore, the extreme stress on Japanese traditions and the typically ethnocentric way in which soldiers are taught to react with the outside world has no place in the modern world, particularly a world into which Japan hopes to advance.

Sugimura was familiar with the American military system (a familiarity he based off of his own readings and perceptions) and he used this knowledge to compare the two. In his opinion, despite the faults of the Japanese system, the American military, and America as a whole, lacked what Sugimura defined as "spiritual strength." It is this spiritual strength which drives Japan forward, but it cannot be enough to sustain the nation. The author advised that if Japan wishes to survive in the new and modern world, it needed to examine the merits present in the American system; not in an effort to immediately discard everything found to be intrinsic to the Japanese regime, but rather to internalize the strengths of a different system. Without change, Japan cannot survive, and Sugimura hoped to effect that change in Japan. In the writings of the kamikaze pilots, we see the repetitious desire to change Japan, to drive

Japan forward and provide it with the ability to survive and thrive in the modern world.

III. Beyond Defeat: Motivations of the Pilots

In 1940 Admiral Yamamoto, when speaking to Fuminaro Konoe, a member of the imperial family, in regards to the prospects of a war with America, commented: “I must tell you that should the war be prolonged for two or three years, I have no confidence in our ultimate victory.”²⁴ While the Admiral died in 1943 and was thus unable to see his prediction come to fruition, the sentiment expressed is of significance. Despite the constant onslaught of victory propaganda, the outcome of the war with America was never entirely certain and victory never assured. It is easy to imagine men deliberately dying for the potential of victory, but as the war progressed that sliver of hope grew thinner and thinner, until, to many men in the military and the general populace, it was gone entirely. Despite this, the Special Attack Force continued to function.

Following the war, the American military conducted a series of interviews of important officials of the Japanese military. One of these interviewees was Captain Rikihei Inoguchi, co-author of the book *Divine Wind*, a somewhat subjective treatise on the special attack forces. In his interview, when asked “at what stage of the war did [he] realize that victory was not possible for Japan?” Inoguchi responded: “battle of Midway.”²⁵ Inoguchi was a strong supporter of the kamikaze program; his work is charged

²⁴ Frank, Pat, and Joseph Daniel Harrington. Rendezvous at Midway; U.S.S. Yorktown and the Japanese Carrier Fleet. New York: John Day Co., 1967. 40.

²⁵ "Kamikaze Corps." United States Strategic Bombing Survey: Pacific: Naval Analysis Division - Interrogations of Japanese Officials. Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office. 64.

with nationalistic fervor, reflecting favorably on these bold young men who went forth willingly to die for their country. However, in his interview response he clearly stated he believed the war to be lost at that point, thus the program he so strongly supported fought a war which had been, at that point, long lost.

If we consider that his opinion of the war being lost at the battle of Midway was at all common among the commanders and soldiers of the army and navy, we unequivocally consider the question of why the kamikaze was formed at all, let alone continued to the extent it did. The battle of Midway took place in June of 1942, whereas the Special Attack Corps was officially instated by Ōnishi in October of 1944; over two years later. If the war had been lost and victory acknowledged as impossible at Midway, the circumstances would certainly remain true two years post-Midway. In this we have two questions: in general, did the individual members of the kamikaze corps know or believe that the war was lost, and, if indeed that was true, why die in the service of a lost cause?

To answer the first question, we turn to reports of the home front. The pilots knew the war was lost as the people of Japan did; a knowledge that trickled down to every person, acknowledged or not. The draft became an eventuality of life, something that people began to expect of every young man of age. The question became not if he would get drafted, but when: when his number would come up and he would go off to war, and in many instances, when he would return home: "the war dead began to return. Everyone lived in

dread of the impending call up."²⁶ Every single home, business and person in Japan felt the effects of the war: no one was immune. They touched everyone, whether through the draft or the censorship of media, or the constant shortening of rations. It is difficult to be optimistic about the state of war when there clearly is not even enough food to go around.

Furthermore, there were the obvious differences between America's military situation following the battle of Midway and Japan's. The attack on Pearl Harbor was the farthest extent of Japan's military might: it never again extended its reach so far east across the Pacific. In the time between Pearl Harbor and the battle of Midway, Japan accumulated victory after victory but progressed no further east; indeed, following Pearl Harbor, it never again was able to attack Hawaii. The successive battles were fought at sea and, progressively, closer and closer to the islands of Japan, until the land invasion of Okinawa itself begun. At that point; however, full-scale firebombing of major Japanese cities had long been in effect; some of the greatest devastation wreaked upon Japanese cities was not done by the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the closing of the war, but by constant firebombing. Tokyo and Osaka were laid waste by these bombs and the fires they caused.

While firebombing had been an issue, the severity of attacks only increased with the loss of Okinawa to the Americans in mid-June of 1945.²⁷ Okinawa had been thought of as the last stage of defense before a full-scale

²⁶ Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook. Japan at War: An Oral History. Trans. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. New York: The New Press, 1992. 179.

²⁷ Havens, Thomas R.H. Valley of Darkness: the Japanese People and World War II. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978. 185.

land invasion was possible, and now it was gone. The American flyers devastated Yokohama and Osaka on May 29th and 31st, respectively, dropping 3,200 tons of explosives on each city, a tactic that repeated on July 10th, when 2,000 fighters bombed cities from Kyushu to as far north as Tokyo.²⁸ The populace, at this point, had suffered through constant rationing and drafts, but the harsh reality presented by the total devastation of the firebombed cities was impossible to ignore.

Japan was no longer fighting an offensive war, but instead concentrating on its defensive front, and it was not lost on the pilots. "If we are going to win...well, when do we start?...Are we making it bad for the Americans? Are we bombing California, New York, Washington?"²⁹ As the responsibilities of the kamikaze pilots were not limited to their final attack sortie – they would often serve as escort pilots on the suicide runs of fellow pilots, providing cover for those planes until they were in range of their targets – they would see their friends crash into ship after ship; or, more frequently, miss their target entirely and meet their demise in the Pacific. Every day they lived with reminders of their impending and eventual death, but to continually see their friends fly to that same death took a toll on the pilots, and it became readily and insidiously apparent to them that the entirety of Japan's military might was focused on defending the homeland, and not attacking America. The inevitability of such circumstances wore on the mentality of all members of the military.

²⁸ Ibid. 185.

²⁹ Kuwahara, Yasuo. Kamikaze. Trans. Gordon T. Allred. New York: Ballantine Books, 1957. 104.

When a friend lost a leg in an accident with his plane, Kuwahara and his fellow pilots spoke with the mother of the now amputated boy: "She spoke to us as a mother: 'Listen to me, my sons. Your minds are filled with ideas, ideas of honor, of glory. You think about courage, about dying valiantly – all these things. Why? There is nothing honorable about dying for a lost cause!'"³⁰ Although grief colored her reactions, her words have weight: if the war was already lost, why would the pilots sacrifice their lives, especially with such a visceral example of the torment and pain their families would experience upon their injury or death? The reasons she list – such as 'dying valiantly' – were not examples we often see in the reasoning and rationale of the men of the corps. It is true the kamikaze received a promotion of two grades following the successful completion of their mission, and thus, posthumously, a jump in position that would have included a raise in pay as well.³¹

The words of a grieving mother Kuwahara provided in his writing clash strongly with the propaganda of the day. Nagatsuka Ryuji, in his own autobiographical account of his days in the Special Attack Corps, related an incident involving a traveling show that performed at his own base during training. Within the play, there is a mother who, having lost four of her five sons during the war, admonishes her last surviving child that "your four brothers have sacrificed their lives for their country. I am happy, and I am proud of them. Make sure you, too, die gloriously! If you come back, I will

³⁰ Ibid. 111.

³¹ "Kamikaze Fliers Jumped 2 Grades Posthumously" New York Times 23 Sept 1945.

not allow you to enter the house!"³² Rather than relating at all to the 'come back with your shield or on it' Spartan mentality displayed by the mother, Nagatsuka recoiled from it, stating that despite his position as a soldier, a "cog in the infernal machine called war"³³ it was important that they, all of the soldiers and their families, retain their inherent humanity. To lose that would make the entire war useless, everything they had fought for. His own position as a kamikaze had not implied any lack of interest in his own life, and the play and its false and offensive sentiments were both hurtful and harmful to the mother who had lost sons in the war. This sentiment is one of the first concrete expressions of how important family was to the kamikaze pilots; a mix of nostalgia and concern for their family colored their actions and thoughts.

Furthermore, a number of the pilots express themselves as both vigilantly anti-war and strictly opposed to their country's policies and politics, let alone to the idea of dying for them. This sentiment is particularly strong in the final letter of one pilot, Hasegawa Shin, who was 23 years old when he died. "If only my suffering and death made even the slightest positive contribution to the wellbeing of those that I love!...In this war there is no longer any question of righteousness, it is nothing more than an explosion of hate between races. These opposing races will not stop fighting until one of the other is exterminated. It is terrifying and shameful! Man? A species of

³² Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: The Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973. 86.

³³ Ibid. 86.

ape!"³⁴ In this excerpt, we perceive Hasegawa's severe disdain for the military and the war as a whole, but also his expression that his death is, in the grand scheme of affairs, more or less meaningless. He does not believe his sacrifice will help his country, because the war, as he sees it, is not only a bloated and unnecessary thing, but an endeavor that Japan cannot win. Hasegawa is thus ill at ease with the prospect of his death and with his situation as a whole. A pacifist at heart, the tales of the horrors of war sicken him to the point of pain, and he is contemptuous of the devotion that his fellow pilots possess in regards to their religion and their missions.

Even in Defeat: Motivations of the Pilots

This sentiment of the inevitability of defeat is common amongst the pilots but Hasegawa's letter brings a new element to the aggregation: the idea that whatever he does is completely useless. In the end, he is but one man and cannot attach earth-shattering importance to his life or to his death. However, this is precisely why each pilot finding an individual reason for fighting was so critical. One kamikaze pilot cannot change the outcome of a war, and each and every pilot knew this: thus, the only motivations worth having were personal reasons driving their actions.

While, as we have seen, it is difficult to make over-arching statements about what the kamikaze pilots or, indeed, soldiers in any branch of the

³⁴ Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Ed. Diego Gambetta. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

military, did or did not know in regards to whether the war was lost for Japan, the sentiments of those who did believe that victory was no longer feasible for Japan tell us something critical about the mindset of the kamikaze.

"Japan will be defeated, Yokota," he told me.

I was shocked. I didn't know what else to say at the moment, for I had never heard anyone in the military discuss the possibility before, so I came back with, "Then why do you volunteer to die?"

"A man must do what he can for his country," was his simple answer. His death meant nothing, he added. "Japan will be defeated, of that I am sure. But she will rise again, and become a greater nation than ever before." [He] went on to explain that a nation had to suffer and be purified every few generations, so that it could become stronger by having its impurities removed. Our land was now being bathed in fire, he said, and she would emerge all the better because of it."³⁵

While the two men here are members of the Kaiten unit, the intent and emotion was common to both the Kaiten and Kamikaze units as, despite the obvious geographical differences, both units had essentially the same aims.³⁶ The desire to protect and further the nation of Japan, to die so it can continue on greater than it was before, is a powerful image. It is an image that echoed the words of the emperor upon the surrender of Japan: "It is according to the dictates of time and fate that we have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering the unsufferable."³⁷ The image the kamikaze hoped to create was meant to lead Japan through this unendurable period of defeat following the war.

³⁵ Morris, Ivan. "The Kamikaze Fighters: If Only we Might Fall." *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975. 313-314.

³⁶ The Kaiten Unit was a unit of the navy comprised of suicide torpedoes.

³⁷ "The Meiji Era." *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm Theodore DeBary, and Donald Keene. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. 1017.

It is a sentiment echoed, with shades of interpretation and subtle differentiations of meaning unique to the author, throughout other letters. Sasaki Hachiro mixed his own political and social views into his beliefs on what Japan should become and how his sacrifice helped to achieve those beliefs: "some relics of the old capitalist system are still lying about here and there. If that deeply rooted power, which possesses the most intricate of all survival techniques, could quickly be smashed by way of our country's losing the war, maybe then the defeat might ironically be considered a blessing. Such a result would be like something new that rises from the ashes, like the phoenix, and that is exactly what we are all looking for."³⁸ Whereas the prior Kaiten pilot speaks of defeat as inevitable, Sasaki here writes about it as something not yet determined, but perhaps for the best. While he harbors no love for the idea of Japan's defeat at the hands of America, a part of him understands that this outcome is nearly inevitable and thus Japan can implement it as an agent of great change, a chance for a new beginning through the destruction of the old. These sentiments – destruction of the old for a reinvention of the new – are very much akin to the reasoning of a revolutionary. The pilots, many of whom could read in four or five languages, were no stranger to communist and socialist thought, theory, and literature.³⁹ When Sasaki speaks of the war again he states that: "On the issue of whether we are going to win or lose the war; however, I cannot afford to have an

³⁸ Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 121.

³⁹ Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. 373-399

opinion,"⁴⁰ something which seems to run almost counter to his earlier statement of "it would not really matter if we were defeated once, or even twice; so long as at least some Japanese people survive, Japan will not be destroyed."⁴¹ Here we have the inevitability of defeat, but not of failure; Sasaki believed in his ability to use his death to inspire the Japanese remaining following the defeat. Those remnants of the original population would have been truly Japanese, and through them the country would take on new shape, something closer to the more liberal governments of which Sasaki read. The question stands; however, if this sentiment was something that the kamikaze more or less unanimously believed in, or if other reason take a stronger preference.

It is important to reflect on what Sasaki as an individual believed in. Above all else, Sasaki strove to remain a mix of an informed idealist and a nationalist. He was fully aware of his own situation, and in fact prided himself on his ability to recognize and accept his place in the scheme of the military and the progress of his own life: "At the moment we are born, we are in history. We are the subject that lives in the object....We cannot detach ourselves from our present condition."⁴² Although Sasaki felt that it was easy, and on some level inherently comforting, to detach himself from the pressing reality of his own situation, he was determined to instead focus on his present.

⁴⁰ Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 121.

⁴² Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections of Japanese Student Soldiers. Trans. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 47, 52.

He realized and accepted his place as a member of the special attack corps and how he could serve his country through his position as a pilot.

However, in examining Sasaki's writings, as in looking at all of the writings left behind by the pilots, we must look at the different opinions expressed within the letter or journal. While it is undeniable Sasaki demonstrated a strong, nationalistic fervor in his letters, it is tempered by his own self-doubt and indecision. He was not completely sure of himself or of his cause, but trusts in that cause and expects the proper path will become clear to him in time. His devotion to his cause was not blind or ill-thought: Sasaki, like many of the kamikaze pilots, possessed a well-trained analytical mind; however, his devotion did run deep enough that he was willing to follow this course to its logical, and fatal, conclusion.

Ohnuki-Tierney, in *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalism*, addresses at length the division between *pro patria mori* and *pro rege et patria mori*; discussing which of the two was the more valid reason driving pilots to enlist in the kamikaze corps.⁴³ While both are significant, analysis of sources and writings from the kamikaze as well as other Japanese soldiers testifies to the prominence of the former instead of the latter. "Nobody fights a war because they like it. 'Nation's orders,' 'Emperor's orders' – that's what they said. What could you do but go? If an order was issued and you didn't go, you were a traitor. There's not one soldier who ever died saying '*Tennō Heika banzai!*' [Long Live the Emperor!] I was with hundreds of men when

⁴³ Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. 222.

they died. The dead lay with grimaces on their faces."⁴⁴ The men of the kamikaze corps were not the only men faced with the prospect of their own deaths; all soldiers existed in close proximity to their own mortality, and furthermore, the mortality rates for the members of any division of the army or navy were substantial. With the kamikaze pilots, death was a certainty instead of a possibility. As such, the idea of dying for your nation was something all soldiers were well acquainted with.

Because of the inevitably fatal nature of the kamikaze's final missions, all writings we have that reflect on their final thoughts and emotions are wills, last letters left for their families, and final statements. There is, of course, the rare example where a pilot's mission was canceled, either on account of weather so inclement it made flight impossible, or mechanical failures with the planes.⁴⁵ In other circumstances, pilots missed their targets but survived the crash landing.⁴⁶ In these instances we have records of their last wills but also of their reflections on their almost-deaths. However, the great majority of writing is in the form of diaries and final testimonies. Ohnuki-Tierney discusses the problems inherent in interpreting the motives and emotions of the pilots from their last words and final documents. As their superiors told them quite often that these final testimonies could and would be shown to the public after their deaths, what is written on the paper may express what the

⁴⁴ Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook. Japan at War: An Oral History. Trans. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. New York: The New Press, 1992. 35.

⁴⁵ Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: The Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973. 86.

⁴⁶ See I was a Kamikaze, wherein the author, in trying to escape pursuit from an American fighter plane, crashes his own plane onto land and lives, although severely injured, to be rescued by the Japanese naval forces after the battle.

pilots wanted the public to think of them, or what their superiors edited the statements into resembling. There is a body of letters left behind to the pilots respective families that have escaped this distortion, but the mindset of the pilots and the factors effecting that mindset should be considered when viewing their final documents.⁴⁷

While it is an important consideration to make, those conditions do not disqualify or invalidate the writings left behind. Often, the emotions of the pilots are strong enough to remain unhindered by any such restrictions; in the end, the feeling is what carried through. "Wills are all nonsense! I am not going to write any will. I did write one, when we were out before....It was so pompous and presumptuous that I actually blushed when I read it...Men like us don't need to write a memorial of ourselves."⁴⁸ Statements such as these demonstrate that, in spite of (and to some extent, because of) their situation, the pilots possessed a strong sense of pride in what they did and who they were, a pride that helped adhere them to their own beliefs. On a fundamental level, all of the pilots' motivations were deeply personal, and in order to remain strong and firm to their own individual beliefs, a sense of personal pride was required.

One of the most frequently seen reasons and rationalizations that the men of the corps express is a sense of *pro familia mori*: death for one's family. Duty to emperor and to country is important, but to a single soldier the

⁴⁷ Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. 21.

⁴⁸ Yokota, Yutaka and Joseph D. Harrington. Kamikaze Submarine. New York: Norton Publications, 1962. 126.

country as a whole can be an intangible concept, an ideal instead of a reality. By rationalizing their deaths could serve to protect their families, the pilots often found reason to do as they did. "I never thought 'Long Live the Emperor!' To bring the nation to victory was our thought, and what was that nation? The land of my parents, younger brothers, and sister. Can we bear seeing our country invaded by outside enemies. That's what was on my mind."⁴⁹ By protecting Japan, they were protecting the land of their families, ensuring their further safety. By doing their part to further the war effort, to help Japan achieve victory over the enemy or forestall the devastating effects of a full-scale land invasion, one that could result in the deaths of their loved ones, the pilots could protect the members of their families.

This sentiment of protecting and helping one's family is also tied up in the ideas of protecting and furthering the glory of Japan. The links begin with the idea that protecting Japan or helping their country in any way, they are protecting and serving the land of their families, but the ties are deeper than that. "It had been my dream to make Japan like the Great British Empire of Old. This ideal is shattered. Because of this, simply for the freedom and independence of Japan, I happily sacrifice my life."⁵⁰ Uebara Ryoji, who died at age 22, was a student recruit, a highly educated man among the best intellectuals of his age, drafted into the kamikaze corps. In his words we see the effects of his intellectualism and his study of liberal ethics: "I have long

⁴⁹ Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook. Japan at War: An Oral History. Trans. Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook. New York: The New Press, 1992. 142.

⁵⁰ Making Sense of Suicide Missions. Ed. Diego Gambetta. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 37.

thought that if Japan is really going to continue for ever, liberalism is necessary."⁵¹ Uebara expressed a desire for Japan to change, to become like the liberal nations he has read about; like the British Empire he researched and, to a degree, idolized. However, when he thought that to be impossible in the face of Japan's overwhelming totalitarian war regime, as he stated it, he was still willing to die for his country, and more specifically, for the freedom and continual independence of his country. He possessed in this a resigned sense of hope, aware that his original aim cannot be achieved, he was still ready and able to assign significance to his death.

In many of the writings, we can see that the pilots, and indeed the military as a whole, valued their lives highly, but were willing to put that life aside for what they viewed as more precious. That more precious thing itself varies, of course, but the themes of family and country remain common. "If in my heart I hold that treasure, I will welcome my death."⁵² The author of this diary, Takushima, was well acquainted with suffering and despair in his life: his mother and grandmother both died recently prior to his writings of the dairy. He only wrote for the benefit of those who loved him, and he acknowledges it as a rambling, unwieldy work. But despite all that, he still

⁵¹ Ibid. 37.

⁵² 聞けわだつみのこえ. Tokyo: Kodansha. 1995. 31. The entire section of the passage of the dairy reads as follows: "In those children [here the pilot references an incident where he and his corps saw children] there was a deep feeling I loved more than you. [his lover] Perhaps you are mad. But do not be angry. In that moment, please understand my heart. Truly, for those sad children, my life will end.

Myself, a seemingly strong man, doesn't hold onto ideas of religion. Thus, to continue to hold onto my actions and convictions, I cannot live – can you understand? If in my heart I hold that treasure, I will welcome my death." The translation is mine.

valued his own life and would not cast it off lightly: he simply found something he treasured to the point that protecting it was worth his life.

There is one person who will cry at my words.
 There is one person who will resent me.
 And so, there is one person who will not forget me.
 Surely, after I die there is one person who will decorate my grave with gardenias.
 The sum of all of us is one.⁵³

In his writings we see an acceptance of death, but despite his words stating he will welcome death if he can die for what he holds most important, Takushima did not truly welcome death. In his work he reflects on the pain his death will cause his loved ones and acknowledges it, but states what he has found – this treasure he now holds in his heart – is more important than his life could ever be, and if in dying he can protect it, it will be, in his eyes, a death well spent. But still, there is regret in his words, and in the poem he composes; regret at who he is leaving behind, a person who he acknowledges as the only person who truly accepts and loves him. To some degree, the fact he will be mourned gives him comfort: in this, there is at least one person who will be affected by his death, and this gives his life meaning and weight. Still, the value of his life stands on its own merits as something with value: it is important to realize his decision to die is not a reflection on the worthlessness of his life, but rather an affirmation that something has become more valuable. Another pilot echoes this sentiment, reflecting on the friends he will leave behind and where his grave will be placed when he is gone, and who shall

⁵³ Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 33.

visit him. These are not the words of men unaware of the gravity of their situations.

It is certainly and undeniably true the kamikaze pilots were inundated with any number of materials which suggested and reinforced the ideals present in the image that the media and officials of the time then projected concerning them: unwavering, unafraid, ready and willing to die. However, in recognizing and acknowledging the image for what it was, we must also realize that the kamikaze were, as a whole, painfully aware of their situation and the final, inevitable consequence of serving in their unit. The writings of Takenori Nakao, member of the Kotohira Suishin Special Attack Unit, reflect this. Much of his letter is concerned with collecting his reflections of life and death and what it means to be a man in his position, constantly facing death every moment of every day. Because he is so close and familiar with death, he tries to understand the specter instead of running from it. He contemplates the true nature of death, and wonders how he may come to understand death. While he brings the nature of the soul and the afterlife into his discussion on death, what is most intriguing is the line in which he describes: "to live well is to die well; therefore it can also be said that, by dying well, one can live well."⁵⁴ How you die is intrinsically linked to your actions in life: thus, Takenori hopes to use his death to validate his life. Death is as much a constant as life, and should be treated with the respect it is due. While Takenori does reference his career as a soldier and his death are in the service of the emperor, his reflections are of a much more personal sort: an

⁵⁴ Ibid. 141.

individualized look at what will have made his death, and thus his life, worthwhile.

For Family and Country: Personal Motivations

Other pilots speak of their motivations for continuing to serve in the special attack forces, and again we see that the desire to protect and serve the future of Japan runs strong. One pilot, Mikuriya Takuji, compares it to an almost biological imperative, the need to protect the future of the bloodline and further the "eternal life" provided by the continuance of the Japanese nation.⁵⁵ The propaganda and the projected images speak of the kamikaze pilots seeking immortality, in a fashion, by dying for their country and becoming *kami*, or spirits, residing eternally at Yasukuni shrine, but here we see that same sense of the eternal used, but instead of becoming it, the pilot serves to protect it. He does not mention or think he will be delivered onto an eternal existence, but rather that in his death he can serve his country as well as his people and thus help craft Japan into something immortal.

The entire concept this pilot brings to bear merits a depth of analysis, as Mikuriya discusses the nature of what drives each kamikaze pilot and what they feel in their moment of death. A pilot's last thoughts, he states, were not about his own fate or the nature of death and life and where he will exist in the grand scheme of the aftermath, but rather that with his death he can serve the "eternal life of Japan," or whether he will be able to destroy his target at all.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 214.

He hopes that in his death he will also exterminate his opponent, because in this way his death gains value and worth. In having a death of substance, he validates his life up to this point as well, and as Mikuriya said: "you might say that he died without completing his life's goals; what you would have to say, however, is that he died happy."⁵⁶ Whether or not the pilots truly died happy is a point of contention, as some of the diaries clearly demonstrate an anti-war fervor and continuance of action spurred only by a sense of duty. It is difficult to imagine that anyone could honestly be glad in the moments of impending death, but here we have the idea that in knowing his death accomplished something, served his nation in some way, the pilots obtained enough peace of mind to continue with their mission.

Time and time again, we see that the pilots are well aware of the suffering endured by their families, themselves, and all people of Japan. Another kamikaze recruit, Ichishima Yasuo, recounts his departure from home to join the kamikaze corps. Upon saying goodbye to his family and friends who have gathered to see him off, he views an elderly woman saying goodbye to her son, who is also off to join the special attack forces. Although she, as Ichishima writes, knows she should not cry, she is unable to restrain herself completely, a few desperate tears slip out as she bids her son goodbye. She is unable to speak, and can only cry, but these tears do not shame her, but instead tell volumes about the depth and strength of her heart, to send her son off to war, likely to die for his country. Ichishima states: "I wish I could also tell her [the elderly woman] that the agony which Japan is currently

⁵⁶ Ibid. 214.

undergoing is for the sake of making a grand ideal a reality. Without agony, the light cannot be attained, and her agony too is exactly that."⁵⁷ If we follow this statement to its logical conclusion, we have the idea, once more, that the soldiers of Japan are willing to sacrifice a great deal, even their lives, in order for Japan to achieve a greater vision. However, the entry also implies that not only members of the military, but every man, woman and child in Japan must be ready and willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary for the future of Japan. The pain of a mother losing her son is, to Ichishima, just as tangible as the fear of dying that all soldiers experienced. Despite that, this pain is worthwhile for the future of Japan.

Ichishima also writes, at length, about the depth of feeling and devotion present in each and every member of the special attack corps. He speaks of his plane with a great deal of affection, referring to it as his "beloved plane"⁵⁸ and details at length the joy he finds in flying. His journal entries turn poetical on flying and the glories of Japan that he sees before him: upon passing Mount Fuji he writes: "I looked to my right and saw the utterly sublime Mt. Fuji. A lump came into my throat and tears fell – so emotional was the realization of how wonderful a thing it was to have been born in Japan."⁵⁹ Ichishima is driven to do what he does because of his deep devotion to the country of his birth; however, it is important to note that while he cites a dedication to Japan, nowhere in his writings does he link this commitment to Japan with a allegiance to the emperor. For Ichishima, the

⁵⁷ Ibid. 222.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 224.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 225.

driving factor and motivation for his actions comes from his love for his country and the people in it, and is not at all related to any sense of purported loyalty to the emperor. There is a sense of duty present in what he does, certainly, but he attributes this duty to different sources.

When Ichishima speaks, he also addresses the topic of the presence of *yamato damashii*, a uniquely Japanese spirit that all of the kamikaze pilots, in the writer's opinion, embody fully. The *yamato damashii* drove them as much as any other obligation or duty; indeed, in some senses it is to this *yamato damashii* that the pilots owed their allegiance. By extension, we can state that they therefore must have felt an obligation to Japan as well, and while they did, it is important to separate the idea from the reality: whatever Japan in actuality was, each pilot carried with him an idea of the country, and it was that idea, and the protection of it, which comprised Ichishima's *yamato damashii*. In Ichishima's writings we see another side to the spectrum of emotions displayed by the kamikaze pilots. Whereas other pilots expressed regret or anger at what they would be expected to do, and others demonstrated resignation or determination, Ichishima illustrates a sense of love embodied in all of his journal entries. He is devoted to the *yamato damashii* ideal, describing it as "one of the most beautiful paths that any human being could possibly walk....I owe it all to the great love of God and the most beautiful love of those who surrounded me."⁶⁰

As the pilots approached their final sortie dates, everything they did took on greater significance. "Everything I do today will be for the very last

⁶⁰ Ibid. 227.

time in my life,"⁶¹ writes kamikaze pilot Otsuka Akio. This is not the writing of someone unaware of his own mortality: Otsuka fully realized the ultimately and inevitably fatal consequences of his actions as a member of the corps. He cherished his life and the relationships he had with those around him, and the realization that they would pass saddened him. Because of this, when he writes to his family, he imbues his letter with a light-hearted tone: "because I will be smiling, please smile along with me,"⁶² he writes, referring to the expression he will try to maintain on his final mission. In keeping a light-hearted mindset and appearance for his family, he can maintain their own high spirits, insofar as such a thing is able. He cares about his family's welfare to the degree that he is willing to maintain a brave front for their sake.

We also see that the pilots tended to localize their concerns and reasons behind what they did. Japan as a whole is an all-reaching and somewhat nebulous concept, and to think of the welfare of all Japanese can be equally daunting. Thus, the pilot would associate their actions with the protection of his own family or a particular member of his family, and through this mechanism protecting "Japan" and protecting his "family" become almost interchangeable terms. We see this identification once again in Otsuka's letters to his mother, wherein he states that, in reference to his mother's current weight and health: "Mother, I have always identified the health of our entire family with your own personal health."⁶³ Here we have the same association we have seen prior to this, but it is on a smaller scale; the pilot,

⁶¹ Ibid. 228.

⁶² Ibid. 230.

⁶³ Ibid. 229.

instead of focusing on the health of his entire family, focuses on the health of his mother. In many ways, this conforms to certain archetypes and patterns we have seen within the letters of the pilots: of all the members of the family, the pilots most commonly identified with their mothers. They felt closest to them, mentioned them in their writings, and addressed their last wills directly to their parents, and often, specifically their mothers. In this way they were able to stay connected to their parents and families, and through that connection, associate strongly to their mission as kamikaze pilots.

The bond to one's mother is repeated in the sentiments of other kamikaze. When he is sent on his final mission, Nagatsuka Ryuji expected to die; however, he managed to survive his final attack; when engaged in combat with American forces in route to his target, his plane was hit and went down. Nagatsuka, amazingly, was able to force a landing in a rice paddy field and the villagers recovered him and submitted him to a local hospital. Here, he was able to reflect on his crash and recovery. The experience, unsurprisingly, colors his writings; here, Nagatsuka had the opportunity to come back from quite literally the brink of death itself. Every pilot departed on his final sortie fully expecting to die, and in this Nagatsuka was no different. However, he survived, and following that experience, his thoughts were of his mother: "Assailed by a thousand sentiments, I would have liked to fall asleep in my mother's arms, serenely, as if I had still been a child."⁶⁴ After such a harrowing event, Nagatsuka instinctually reverts to thoughts that give him the

⁶⁴ Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: The Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973. 203.

most comfort and security, here shown as thoughts of his mother. At the basest level, his mother is the focal point representation of his own sense of security: she is his family and part of what comprises his own sense of duty.

When Nagatsuka was recuperating in the hospital, he listened to the emperor's announcement that Japan had surrendered and wondered if, somehow, he was responsible for the fate that had now befallen his country: "Our country had suffered a total defeat....Had I effectively contributed to the defense of my country? I had not been able to shoot down either the B-29 or the Grumman; I had failed...after my return to base, life had been nothing but humiliation."⁶⁵ Although it was expectedly rare, kamikaze pilots did, on occasion, survive their missions, to be found and either placed in a hospital under Japanese supervision or to be recovered by the very American forces they had tried to destroy. The attitude of these pilots upon their rescue is one of the aspects of the Japanese that the American accounts appear to have difficulty reconciling internally. Accounts detail men who appear distraught over their failure to die, a lapse they are only too willing to correct through suicide. While the American sources of the time are quick to write this off as the result of a suicide impulse or disregard for life intrinsically present in the alien Japanese race, if we consider the pilots' feelings for their families, and in particular, the importance he places upon his mother, we may come to a rather different conclusion.

Pilots such as Nagatsuka associated the welfare of his mother with the welfare of his family, and his family with the entirety of Japan. By protecting

⁶⁵ Ibid. 202.

one, they were indelibly protecting the other; furthermore, the importance of the continuance of maternal welfare should not be understated. Otsuka spends a full paragraph in his letter speaking on his mother's weight and how she should take care not to lose any because, as he said, "I could not bear thought of you ever losing weight over anything that happened to me. Your good health has been a daily source of comfort to me ever since I entered the navy."⁶⁶ Nagatsuka is able to draw support from his mother's continued health. It provided him with something to fixate on, a tangible cause to focus and devote his attentions upon.

While we do see frequent examples of the pilots' devotion and dedication to their cause, the dichotomy present in the reasons behind that devotion is of interest. Ultimately, the reason often cited as driving the kamikaze pilots – service to the emperor – is of little importance compared to the reasons we have discussed earlier: loyalty to and a desire to protect one's family, the desire to protect one's country, or a desire to help one's friends. While all of these function as aspects of the duty that drives a pilot, rarely, if ever, do we see the pilots cite a direct and compelling need to serve the emperor as a reason for what they do. Instead, they rely upon the myriad of other reasons to form their motivation and sense of obligation for what they do. Toshimasa Hayashi, a member of the Shinpu Special Attack Unit, typifies much of this mentality quite well in his letters and journal entries.

⁶⁶ Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 229.

Toshimasa is undeniably devoted to the kamikaze cause; however, he has very personal reasons driving that devotion: "I will live and die for my fatherland, my comrades of the 13th class, all those senior fighting men who are members of the 'students mobilized for war' program, and, lastly, for my own pride. I shall do so cursing all the while the Imperial Navy..."⁶⁷ Here he cites all of the reasons he discovered which drive him to follow his course as a pilot. Several of the themes – defense of the "fatherland," for example, are ones we have seen earlier, while others are relatively uncommon among the writings of the pilots. In examining the remaining motivations individually, we find that Toshimasa substantiates themes uncovered earlier in our analysis of the pilots.

When Toshimasa speaks of the other pilots in his division, it is easy to see the camaraderie the men developed with one another. They are no longer merely fellow soldiers, they have become friends, and in their own way units of a larger family, and as we have seen repeatedly, the concept of family was one of great importance to the pilots, one they took lengths to protect. In thinking of the men of their corps as their compatriots and furthermore, members of an extended and exclusive family, the pilots could reinforce the bonds between them. Toshimasa writes: "Who exactly is fighting this war now anyway? A full half of my classmates of the 13th class who were bomber pilots on carriers, and my friends, are now already dead."⁶⁸ In this statement, it is clear the pilots of Toshimasa's division developed strong interpersonal

⁶⁷ Ibid. 248.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 248.

relationships, and that those relationships then became a source of strength. When we looked at the alleged beatings and harsh induction and initiation techniques as well as rituals purportedly (and aside from one conflicting account, very probably) present during training for the pilots, it was easy to speculate such training measures existed as a way to foster greater camaraderie among the men, to drive them to heights of bravery for the sake of their unit. In other words, by instilling a sense of brotherhood among the men of a unit, commanding officers could expect that the men would be more willing to do something reckless, something suicidally stupid, in the defense of their fellow pilots.⁶⁹

Toshimasa does cite one reason in his text that, prior to this writing, has been fairly uncommon: the sense of completing his mission for personal pride. While, as we have seen with Nagatsuka, pilots did take pride in what they did and felt humiliation at a failed attack attempt or an attack run they had to prematurely abort, Toshimasa's sense of pride goes deeper than that. It is rooted in his own idealism: his idealistic views and beliefs about himself, and the ideals he has for his own country. "I have changed so much, but the pure flame of idealism still burns in the bottom of my heart...I have lived my whole life through as an idealist, and now that I have at least been able to keep

⁶⁹ The tactic of fostering camaraderie to be used as a weapon during battle hardly something unique to this situation. Used throughout history, it is often better used in infantry, where the men would fight side by side. The distance separating the men of a kamikaze unit, as each was in his own plane and thus separated from the fellow men, was actually detrimental to this sort of camaraderie. Still, as pilots who had not yet gone on their final sorties would often serve as escorts to those departing for an attack run, ensuring they would reach their direction, the sense of brotherhood still served to enforce morale and loyalty among the ranks. If we move forward several decades, we can see the tactic used to great effect by the American military in Vietnam

that promise I made to you then, I am happy to fall like a cherry blossom petal,"⁷⁰ he writes in his journal, referring to his strong personal ideals, some of which include a deep anti-war sentiment.⁷¹ Despite that, he is deeply rooted in his stance as an idealist, to the point where he is more dedicated to the idea of being an idealist than to his ideals themselves. Consequently, if he can remain true to his image of ideal Japan, he will count his death, and thus his life, well spent.

Kamikaze Warship: the Battleship Yamato

While we may analyze each of the writings of the kamikaze pilots individually, the fact remains that each of them existed in an environment where they were constantly surrounded by their peers, inundated with the pressures of being in a group of men who knew that at any moment they could be sent out to die. It is, at times, difficult to achieve a true sense of what the training environment must have been like; however, we can turn to a parallel situation for further comparative analysis. The battleship *Yamato* was, along with the battleship *Musashi*, Japan's largest warship, with a length of 263 meters and a displacement of 67,000 tons. It was covered in steel armor that, at its weakest, was still over half a meter thick, and it boasted an impressive

⁷⁰ *Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Kike Wadatsumi no Koe*. Trans. Midori Yamanouchi and Joseph L. Quinn. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2000. 249.

⁷¹ Toshimasa's statement of "to fall like a cherry blossom petal" refers to being killed in action for the sake of Japan.

range of long-distance firepower. *Yamato* was the pinnacle of naval might expressed by the Japanese in World War II, empowered by the symbolism of its name – as the poetic name for Japan, 'yamato' had strong associations with a fierce sense of nationalism – as well as its formidable physical prowess.⁷² Sent on a one-way mission; in essence, a final suicide sortie, and then sunk by American forces, *Yamato's* final mission is much like any final attack of the kamikaze pilots, although elongated and spread out over the course of time. Of the very few men who survived the ship's destruction, one of them was Ensign Yoshida Mitsuru, a man who was much like the kamikaze pilots in many respects: young, well-educated, well-read, and naturally very intelligent. Through the journal he kept we can see the thoughts and emotions present and how they develop over the course of a final suicide mission.

Before Yoshida left to go on the *Yamato's* final sorties, he began his journal, and the entries before his sortie date are in their own way as telling as those written during the actual mission. "The sortie approaches. Night rations are delicious."⁷³ The anticipation of the final mission and the inevitable fate which accompanies it renders greater enjoyment and satisfaction to the simplest of tasks and routines; this is hardly the actions or reflections of a man who eagerly awaits his own death. Yoshida repeats these emotions when describing his last meal: "Indescribably delicious. My final treat."⁷⁴ He savored his final meal, as he savored life. We see this enjoyment of food once

⁷² Mitsuru, Yoshida. *Requiem for Battleship Yamato*. Trans. Richard H. Minear. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985. xv.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 59.

more, as Yoshida, during the final battle of the *Yamato*, stumbles upon some forgotten sweets and cookies he had placed within pockets of his raingear. Even surrounded by death, explosions rocking the ship around him, the food remains "delicious. Indescribably delicious."⁷⁵ At this point in time, fully aware he could die at every second and already having witnessed the violent deaths of many of his fellow sailors, he still takes great pleasure in life. The sentiment is echoed in another reflection of Yoshida's: "After I joined the navy, virtually every night for a month I was tormented by a nightmare: hungry for the printed word, I prowled bookstores, scanning with bloodshot eyes the titles on the spines of books I would never get to read."⁷⁶ Yoshida is a great bibliophile and the mere act of reading and writing gives him great comfort while on board the *Yamato*. Upon joining the navy and faced with the mere possibility of his death, not even, as onboard the *Yamato*, the fully realized inevitability of the event, he is still desperately hungry for what he will be leaving behind if and when he should perish in the line of battle. Like the kamikaze pilots, Yoshida enjoyed his life and took pleasure in what he did every day. His life was not something to be thrown away on some idle whim or pursuit.

This was a sentiment shared by other members in the navy; it is by no means singular to Yoshida. As the *Yamato* leaves on her final voyage, Yoshida notes the expressions of the other sailors who will not be a part of the suicide missions: "from the decks of the remaining ships, seeing them [the

⁷⁵ Ibid. 95.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 15.

Yamato and accompanying ships] off, glances of envy, sighs of grief."⁷⁷

Everyone present was well aware of the fate of the sailors on board the ship, the fate that the men not on board the suicide ships would consequently not be a part of. There was a sense of glory attached to those who died, as other soldiers and sailors would see it, in the service of their country, but any jealousy over this glory was tempered by the realization of how they would achieve that glory. Yoshida records a similar expression when twenty-odd sailors onboard the *Yamato* are transferred to posts aboard another destroyer, one who is not a part of the suicide envoy. "Even when their eyes are filled in fact with regret, one can detect in their words a relief at their narrow escape from the tiger's jaws."⁷⁸ While they had accepted their own fates, it is unsurprising, even expected they would be relieved at their sudden reprieve from death. No one onboard the *Yamato* wanted to die; while they each possessed singular, individual reasons for why they followed orders that would lead to their own certain death, a common factor in all of their justifications is simply the reality of duty. Like any soldier, they were performing their duty, and while, like the sailors who saw the *Yamato* off, they may have expressed envy at not being able to share in the glory of the other men, they were still undeniably relieved when that duty was removed.

As Yoshida kept such a detailed diary, we can more clearly divine his intentions and motivations about his mission. Unlike many of the other writings by the kamikaze pilots, Yoshida does actually make mention of the

⁷⁷ Ibid. 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 25.

emperor as a reason for his actions; however, of particular note is in what context the emperor is invoked: "so long as bullets fly we wish to repay at least a tiny fraction of our indebtedness to the emperor by fighting furiously, each man a match for thousands."⁷⁹ Here, we have a clear mention of the emperor, but it is tempered with a sense of duty. Yoshida does not speak of dying for the emperor, but rather dying to repay the debt he owed to the emperor; dying in the service of that duty. When Yoshida refers to his mission and the mission of the *Yamato*, he frequently calls the ship a "navy special attack force," utilizing a terminology very much identical to that used to refer to the kamikaze, or special attack forces. It is a clear signal of how he views the mission of the ship as a kamikaze mission and all the sailors on it have become, in their own way, kamikaze themselves. Thus in analyzing Yoshida's work we can assume close links between his own thought processes and those of the kamikaze pilots themselves.

Further analysis of Yoshida's own quoted motives yield interesting results. The ground is laid with Yoshida quoting a speech made by Admiral Itō, one of his commanding officers: "you [the *Yamato* sailors] are being requested to die gloriously, heralding the deaths of 100,000,000 Japanese who prefer death to surrender."⁸⁰ In speaking of 'heralding' further potential deaths, Itō projects the impression that it is already fated to pass; the entire nation of Japan is, at this point, doomed. Curiously, this does not lend his words the air of hopelessness we would expect upon being told that victory

⁷⁹ Ibid. 37.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 38.

was unequivocally impossible. Thus, as with the kamikaze, we look for the reasons which prompt fighting and dying for a cause that is already lost, and once again, Yoshida provides this for us in the conversations between sailors. Two in particular demand attention; in the first one, sailor states Japan must be defeated in order to open her eyes to the path of true progress and thus save herself; the second sailor responds that: "We will lead the way. We will die as harbingers of Japan's new life. That's where our real satisfaction lies, isn't it?"⁸¹ Here we see the sentiment of their deaths serving a purpose other than what the purely physical damage to the American forces can account for. In their deaths, they wish to serve Japan, to use their deaths as a beacon for Japan's own actualization and revitalization as a country: seeing Japan's defeat as something that was, at this point, inescapable and necessary in order to bring about a stronger nation.

The second conversation Yoshida recorded details the conflict between what the image of the kamikaze prompts – that all men died for the emperor – and the need for individual and self-important reasons for motivation:

"An O.C.S. man colors and asks in return: 'We die for sovereign and country. I understand that. But isn't there more to it than that? My death, my life, the defeat of Japan as a whole: I'd like to link all these with something more general, more universal, something to do with values. What the devil is the purpose of all this?'

"That's nonsense. That's a useless argument, a dangerous argument. Isn't it enough to wear on your breast the chrysanthemum emblem of the special attack force and to die with 'long live the emperor' on your lips?'

"If that's all there is, I don't like it a bit. There has to be something more."⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid. 40.

⁸² Ibid. 41.

In this debate we see that the idea of the emperor being the sole reason and motivation for a suicide mission is simply not enough for all, or indeed any great percentage, of the men onboard the *Yamato* to invest in. As the sailor Yoshida quoted states, there needs to be something more, a greater and perhaps more personal justification for their actions here. While the actions of a kamikaze are to a degree inherently irrational, every man needed to be able to justify and rationalize them, and the mere banner of emperor worship was hardly sufficient in this respect.

As the *Yamato* is attacked, Yoshida records a shift in his own perceptions and feelings. Prior to the final attack of the American air forces upon the battleship, Yoshida entries are infused with an admiration for the invincibility of the *Yamato* in particular and Japan in general. He is a patriot, and his diary reflects that. He speaks of Japan and of his final mission and the ship he serves on with a great deal of personal pride and admiration. Consequently, the American forces are reduced in his eyes, painted in dull colors and never capable of challenging the might of the battleship *Yamato*. Japan is strong and will be victorious because he believes it to be, and while he is a soldier and a member of this victorious nation of Japan, he too cannot be beaten. However, this assumption is rather harshly put to rest when the final assault upon the *Yamato* begins. Here, we see for the first time his open admiration of the American forces' ability and military might. He describes the planes as marvelous things, almost ethereal in their swift attacks, and the strength of the forces as a whole is something beyond the realm of his

experience, unfathomable.⁸³ They descend, wave after wave upon the ship, and Yoshida reflects that the skill they exhibit must typify the elite of the American forces, so masterful are their attacks. The very idea that Japan can and will lose this battle was anathema to him earlier, and now, presented with the sheer force of the American attack, Yoshida cannot begin to absorb the magnitude of it. The inevitability of the American's attack is as dangerous a weapon as their guns, and Yoshida, at first, is incapable of grasping the fact that the battle was, for all intents and purposes, lost from the first sighting of an American fighter plane.

As Yoshida survived the sinking of the *Yamato*, we have in his journal the rare opportunity to read his reactions to the final battle; in doing so, we see that all the poetic sentiment expressed prior to battle cannot fully prepare one for the true horror of the battle itself. He is confronted with the monumental horror of death, as well as the presence of a "chunk of flesh smashed onto a panel of the broken bulkhead, a red barrel of flesh...a torso from which all extremities – arms, legs, head – have been ripped off."⁸⁴ Upon experiencing this terrible sight and trying, dumbfounded, to piece together the extremities of his fellow sailors and being unable to locate all the pieces of a single corpse, Yoshida was overcome with disbelief more than anything else; the simple inability to comprehend the horror of his situation. At this, many of the notions so proudly quoted before fade, replaced with the reality of death. Yoshida expresses regret and disbelief at the sight of the fallen men who

⁸³ Ibid. 84.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 70.

"hoped by dying to awaken new life. His body, offered up in the cause of a genuine national rebirth, has disappeared into thin air."⁸⁵ Now Yoshida has far greater difficulty in associating the causes the sailors had spoken of dedicating their lives to with the deaths themselves. It has acquired an almost mystic, mythical quality: these men were so devoted to their cause in life, but now, in death, it is difficult to remember what they were fighting for. Yoshida describes the man's body as "offered up" and summarily vanishing into "thin air." In these structural elements we can feel some of his own bewilderment at the situation but also the idea that the now-deceased sailor, in doing his duty to his country, has sacrificed everything he was and simply ceased to be.

Although Yoshida had already decided to die, the decision to die and the response to the actuality of the event when confronted with it are, as Yoshida states, two entirely different concepts: "my mind has realized long since that the end is near but my emotions, a different matter, blaze up, irrationally."⁸⁶ The desire to live is not an emotion that appeals to reason or to common sense; instead, it exists as a baser impulse, one that no amount of prior reasoning can silence when one is at the point of death. In his words, Yoshida illustrates what the kamikaze pilots may have been feeling as they commenced with their own final sorties. Once the ship begins to sink, the fierce instinct to live takes over: "it is not a desire, that I should *like* to live; it is an obligation, that I *must* live. Just as my physical body is on the point of dying, my soul finally ignites; with everything stripped away, only that which

⁸⁵ Ibid. 73.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 104.

is truly me remains."⁸⁷ Despite everything, Yoshida wants to live, and when afforded the opportunity to be relieved of his duty, his obligation, to die, he seized upon it and the opportunity to live.

It is easy, perhaps dangerously so, to objectify the kamikaze pilots, to think of them in terms of what they did instead of who they were. However, in reading their writings and the writings left behind by men such as Yoshida, we become more firmly rooted in the perception of them as individuals. When the *Yamato* finally goes down and those who managed to survive float adrift, we can see how these men are more products of their own extraordinary circumstances than anything else. Adrift in the water, unaware if they are about to live to die, the men are reduced to the desire to live: "throw a line to desperate men and you see humanity stripped naked."⁸⁸ Here we see that not only do the sailors lose the title and facelessness of being a member of the navy, a soldier, but also become desperate in their struggle to survive.

As Yoshida's progress on the *Yamato* continues, the emotions he expresses in his journal also change. By the end of his journal, Yoshida writes statements he would never have conceived of in the earlier pages of his work. Of particular note is his comment that: "in the entire battle not a single pilot is so rash as to crash his plane into us."⁸⁹ For all intents and purposes, the last sortie of the battleship *Yamato* is a suicide mission, not that different from the missions of the kamikaze pilots, yet Yoshida dismisses the idea of an American pilot crashing his plane into the *Yamato*, describing it as rash and

⁸⁷ Ibid. 133.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 130.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 83.

foolish. This seems directly counter to his entire purpose and mission aboard the *Yamato*, a mission that he believed in strongly.

The emotions expressed during a sudden and unexpected reprieve from death are also exhibited in Nagatsuka's journals. While on what should have been his final sortie, the mission run is called off because inclement weather conditions greatly obscured the target, rendering it nearly impossible to hit with a kamikaze attack run. When his commanding officer on the run calls off the attack and orders the return to base, Nagatsuka, as his writings illustrate, experienced a division in his thoughts, as if he has been split into two people, each of which argue convincing, and nearly opposing, positions. His writings demonstrate this dichotomy that developed within his own thoughts. The soldier version of Nagatsuka's thoughts protests at the retreat from the attack run, questioning the action itself: "Why did you turn back? Don't you realize what punishments and humiliations will be waiting for you at the base? The ground crews, even the schoolboys, will look at you coldly. You will suffer for yourself...a military man must respect honour before life....They will say you prefer to suffer mortification rather than die a hero. Shame on you!"⁹⁰ Here, in Nagatsuka's writing, is the indication of peer pressure's influence at the base. In his little speech, very rarely does he mention how his own personal expression of himself will change.

The more humanistic side of Nagatsuka argues a far more different position, appealing to Nagatsuka's sense of self-preservation as well as casting

⁹⁰ Nagatsuka, Ryuji. I was a Kamikaze: The Knights of the Divine Wind. New York: New English, 1973. 192-3.

doubts about the entire kamikaze organization and the war as a whole: "Do I really believe in the efficiency of the suicide-attacks? Perhaps I have been convinced that it was the last and only means of defending my compatriots and saving Japan *against my better judgment*."⁹¹ In this, Nagatsuka is relieved at escaping death, although his relief is tempered by the knowledge it is a short reprieve; he will, at some point soon, be called out on final sortie once more. It is rare that we have the opportunity to examine the writings of a soldier who so narrowly escaped death, and the division of thought in Nagatsuka's writing clearly parallels his own internal struggle. On one hand, there is the clear desire to press forward and continue his duty for honor. While honor and noble self-sacrifice are disproportionably labeled as causes for the kamikaze actions, they were causes ingrained into the mentality of the pilots and bear note. In direct opposition to this is the desire to live and the understanding, however unacknowledged, that his death as a kamikaze pilot may be in service of a desperate and ultimately futile cause.

All this analysis of the writings of the kamikaze pilots has illustrated the pilots were highly educated individuals, fully cognizant of the consequences of their actions. Beyond that, they were individuals, and no two among them possessed exactly the same rationalization for their actions of remaining in the special attack corps. However, the reasons most commonly cited in their image – devotion to the emperor and a blind desire to die for their country and ruler – appear infrequently, if at all.

⁹¹ Ibid. 193.

IV. Images of War

World War II was a war of words and images as much as bullets and bombs. The wartime propaganda machine was in full force for the duration of the war, creating and accentuating images of the Japanese as sub-human, simian beings. These images had a direct effect on the war itself, as the entire nature of Japan became an alien culture, one that the full force of American popular opinion could target. When viewed through the lens of the American media, every man, woman, and child of Japan became a potential enemy, waiting to throw off the thin veneer of civilization, take up arms, and fight to the death against American soldiers.

The media developed this image through a myriad of ways. A many-layered construct, one of its focal points was the prominence of the kamikaze pilots in American thought and media. As an offensive military method, the special attack corps was neither effective nor efficient; however, the sheer spectacle of their organization led to easy dramatization. To America they swiftly became one of the most recognizable and enduring images of the Pacific campaign: an image representative of the Japanese military and people as a whole. To the American populace, “kamikaze” became synonymous with “Japanese,” and every Japanese was simply a suicide pilot without a plane. Through this connection all the dramatic and oftentimes misinterpreted qualities of the pilots were applied to the whole of Japan and all its citizens.

During the course of the war and in the years following, the images connected to the word “kamikaze” and the images associated with them began to change. The initial image, that of a fanatical soldier, metamorphosed into a more positive embodiment of the word: a figure of reckless nobility and possessing the ability to be completely self-sacrificing. The full scope of this shift in perspective is startling, with the latter opinion running at times very nearly counter to the former. Through analysis of American popular media, we can trace the process of this shift and how the image it created and subsequently refined affected the American populace. In the years following the war, the kamikaze – and thus the Japanese – became familiar to the American public and along the way acquired a sense of humanity. As the word itself became accepted by the public and integrated into the English language it accommodated a range of controversial subjects.

The Influence of Race

To the American military and general populace, World War II operated on two distinct fronts: the war in Europe and the war in the Pacific. These two wars, fought half a world away from each other, created distinctly singular impressions in the minds of the people. While there were many factors that shaped the public’s views of the two separate fronts, the race of the combatants became a critical issue. In its own way, race was as important

a factor in the war as the armies themselves, and the war with Germany developed different overtones than the war with Japan because of these race issues.

From the beginning, the war with Germany was a war against Fascism, against the Nazis. America thought of the Nazis as an extremist group within in Germany: they were independent, separate, and in some ways anomalous from the rest of the German populace. The European front could thus be classified as a war against the Nazis and not against the Germans themselves. While the enemy was vilified to a wide extent through propaganda, such efforts targeted the military and the figure of Hitler himself. If we look at American propaganda posters circulated during World War II (see Figure 1) we can see the clear intent to focus America's wrath upon a single person or group: here clearly illustrated by the "Idle Hands Work for Hitler" slogan. The citizens of Germany were supporters of the enemy, but functioned in a civilian capacity. Until the surrender of Germany, the majority of America's attention focused upon the European front and its propaganda focused upon the military itself, not the German people.

This was not the case for the war against Japan. Here Japan itself was the enemy, and the war was waged against the entirety of the country. The Japanese, or 'Japs,' were cast as sub-human, possessing a simian countenance and behavior. The Pacific War was a war against the Japanese people, and there was no extremist faction or military leader to take the brunt of the criticism and propaganda. Instead, the Japanese military and by extension her

people, were viewed as parts of a homogenous whole, a hive mind where each member was willing and eager to sacrifice himself for the good of the country. The idea that the Japanese placed little to no value on human life permeated America's image of the country. Even after the war this image persisted: political cartoons printed during the occupation depict a tiny, bespectacled, buck-toothed and apish figure being lorded over by the much larger and obviously more human American, often General MacArthur, who headed the occupation efforts.⁹² Although the war had ended, the sub-human image of the Japanese did not immediately vanish but rather assumed an Occupation-era guise.

During the war the army commissioned director Frank Capra to create a series of propaganda films which were to be required viewing for all American soldiers. This series, entitled "Why We Fight," covered both the Axis and Japan fronts, and "Know Your Enemy – Japan" detailed many of the misconceptions that were to shape early American perceptions of Japan. Japan was depicted as a fanatical country that brainwashed its children into being soldiers and stressed the importance of death rather than surrender. While some aspects of the film's mantra were similar to the elements of bushido, the "way of the warrior" disciplines of the samurai which the pilots were familiar with, the film twisted that ideology away from its essentials and into a nearly unrecognizable shape. The film also rooted Japanese fanaticism in spiritual belief, creating the concept that any Japanese citizen would die willingly as they could expect to be reborn as a glorious reward for their

⁹² "Japan's Fanatics are M'arthurs's No. 1 Problem." New York Times 26 Aug 1945.

sacrifice. Through this idea of being reborn, the Japanese became soldiers who had no fear of death, and that made them all the more terrifying.

By the very nature of who they were and what they did, the kamikaze pilots furthered this fanatical image. Created during the war, it persisted as a problem even after Japan had surrendered in late August of 1945: "Japanese fanaticism which produced the Kamikaze suicide pilots must be reckoned with."⁹³ The kamikaze were regarded as a natural extension of the mindset and society of the Japanese: everything they were was a result of their status as Japanese, not their position as members of the Special Attack Corps. From American perspectives the entire idea of suicide bombers may have seemed ludicrous, but it was a ridiculousness that could be expected and almost accepted coming from Japan. As such, it raised critical issues about the consequences of a full scale land invasion in Japan: "the Japanese Government might determine upon resistance to the end...In such an event the allies would be faced with the enormous task of destroying an armed force of 5,000,000 men and 5,000 suicide aircraft (kamikaze), belonging to a race which had already amply demonstrated its ability to fight literally to the death."⁹⁴ While this opinion was given two years after the war, reflecting on the events of the Pacific Campaign and in defense of the atomic bombings, the consequences of a full-scale land invasion was an issue that weighed heavily on the minds of every soldier engaged in the Pacific theater.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Truman Used Atom Bomb to Halt War, Stimson Says." New York Times. 28 Jan 1947.

To America, the kamikaze demonstrated a mix of desperation and fanaticism on the part of the Japanese, a feeling generated by the ludicrousness of the suicide pilots, and the history surrounding the word kamikaze. "The Japanese believing that the storm was heaven-set [sic], immortalized it in their national archives as the kamikaze, the 'Divine Wind'. It is plain that, in choosing the name Kamikaze for the suicide corps, the Japanese are admitting that they are lost unless the 'divine wind:' can again prevent the invasion of their 'sacred' islands."⁹⁵ With one comment Frank Colby, the author of this *Los Angeles Times* editorial, called into question not only the motives of the kamikaze institution and its inception, but formally and outwardly stated that the Japanese navy founded the entire organization as a last-ditch effort, placing all of their hopes and faith into the distant specter of divine providence. It is an idea Colby ridiculed and degraded as blind and imbecilic faith. Writing in July of 1945, Colby felt the war had long since been lost for the Japanese, barring divine intervention, and that they continue to fight at all was clear proof of their irrational and alien nature.

Political cartoons of the time mirrored Colby's views of Japanese fanaticism through a parodying of the "last man standing" fighting that by some units of the military demonstrated during the war. The image itself developed before the kamikaze even appeared in battle, and instead appeared following Japan's failed attempt to seize control of the Aleutian Islands and the desperate fighting of a garrison to the very last man, despite fairly insurmountable odds. The cartoon displays two chimpanzees paddling away

⁹⁵ Colby, Frank. "Take my Word for it: Kamikaze." *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Jul 1945.

from the sinking wreckage of a crashed Japanese fighter, desperately inflating the inner tube that comprises the base of their makeshift raft as they go (see Figure 2).⁹⁶ The image depicted the Japanese effort in the war as desperate and mostly ineffectual, a slipshod construction ready to fall apart at any second. Other comics also supported this image: one displays an apish soldier balanced precariously on an overlong plank labeled "the Aleutians." About to fall off, he clings to the board although it seems barely able to support his weight, unaware, although it is deliberately obvious, that he lacks the resources to continue fighting effectively (see Figure 3).

The profiling of acts during the war as fanaticism was coupled with a more common stereotyping of all members of the Japanese military as brutal and animalistic. Playing off the idea of the Japanese's simian characteristics, the media displayed the Japanese as back-stabbing chimpanzees or otherwise sub-human beings: a threat to the American populace and general way of life. The attack on Pearl Harbor contributed to this image, as the attack was generally considered treacherous for a host of reasons, among them the fact that Japan had not declared war on America at the time of the assault. As the war continued, we can see an increased repetition of this theme of treachery; furthermore, the images themselves depict acts of increasingly horrific and deceitful nature.

⁹⁶ Dower, John W. War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 184.

Thank God for the Atomic Bomb: the Extent and Effects of Image

The kamikaze served as one of the many components that comprised the jigsaw-puzzle picture of American perceptions of Japan during the War. To begin with, the extremist actions of the special attack corps contributed to the image of Japan as a nation comprised entirely of fighters who did not value their own lives and would be willing to throw them away at a moment's notice. This image in turn created, at least partly, the notion that a full-scale land invasion would have required a fierce and bloody battle, taking the land in scant degrees with an astronomical toll in soldier's lives. There are two sides to the controversy surrounding the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – one stated dropping the atomic bomb saved lives by ending the war quickly, while the other declared the bomb was an unnecessary action, to the detriment and destruction of many lives. As such, it is difficult to discern the exact impact the kamikaze's constant attacks had on the mindset of those responsible for the decision to drop the atomic bombs. However, when Ōnishi decided to propose the very idea of the kamikaze corps, he did so, in part, with the intent to wage a psychological war upon America, to affect the very mindset of the country and its military.

True to Ōnishi's wishes, the kamikaze attacks did have enormous effect on the American psyche and the public's perception of the Japanese, although the effect was not entirely what he had intended. Instead of destabilizing and demoralizing the American troops, the kamikaze attacks

fostered within the soldiers a sense that the Japanese were, at their worst, inhuman fanatics, out to destroy them at any cost: “*destroy*, notice: not hurt, frighten, drive away, or capture.”⁹⁷ There was no middle ground, no hope of surviving if the Japanese managed to win a battle or overtake a group of soldiers. This sense of desperation, an all-or-nothing, us-or-them sentiment pervaded those words, and on the battlefield the enemy became a caricature of himself, with all his malignant and misheard qualities magnified.

In his essay entitled “Thank God for the Atomic Bomb,” former World War II soldier Paul Fussell writes from his perspective as a combatant, dealing with the harsh truths of the battles that occurred on the Japanese mainland. While there was a great deal of evidence and popular support for the argument and opinion that the bomb was dropped in haste, causing the unnecessary destruction of two cities and tens of thousands of civilians, Fussell urges that we consider the alternative to dropping the atomic bombs, and his alternative is, as we could expect, skewed by his perceptions of the Japanese that he integrated into his personal worldview when he was a soldier.

The alternative to the bombs was a full-scale land invasion, taking Japan inch by blood-drenched inch. This alternative was real and fully tangible: by July 10th, 1945 the firebombing of the main islands had begun in earnest and the battleships *Iowa*, *Missouri*, *Wisconsin*, and *King George V* had been bombing the coastline, “softening it up” for land troops.⁹⁸ We have discussed that, by the invasion and capture of Okinawa and the successive

⁹⁷ Fussell, Paul. “Thank God for the Atomic Bomb.” Thank God for the Atomic Bomb and Other Stories. New York: Summit Books, 1988. 15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 17.

firebombing of the major cities of Tokyo and Osaka, it was beginning to become sickeningly apparent to the Japanese that the war was lost, or at the very least, no longer remotely in their favor. However, the American troops felt no cessation of hostilities or lessening of the mortal damage done by Japanese attacks. Instead the intensity, if anything, increased, leading to the sentiment which Fussell supports, below expressed in the diary of another soldier:

After Biak the enemy withdrew to deep caverns.⁹⁹
 Rooting them out became a bloody business which reached its ultimate horrors in the last months of the war. You think of the lives which would have been lost in an invasion of Japan's home islands – a staggering number of American lives but millions more of Japanese – and you thank God for the atomic bomb.¹⁰⁰

After experiencing the bitter and bloody reality of war for weeks and months on end, it is not unsurprising that any chance to end the war would be welcome. But it was the expectation of more, possibly fiercer, fighting, rather than the thought of an immediate cease-fire, which prompted the above comment. The “fighting ‘grew more vicious the closer we got to Japan’” one soldier remarked when reflecting upon the Okinawa campaign. The kamikaze pilots had fostered the idea and the expectation that a full-scale land invasion would be a fierce blood bath, a massacre on both sides where “[every Japanese] soldier, civilian, woman, and child would fight to the death with

⁹⁹ A strategic airfield of the Japanese military was located on Biak, a small Indonesian island north of New Guinea. The Battle of Biak was fought from May 27th, 1944 to June 20th, to an American victory. While American losses were minimal, the Japanese suffered relatively heavy losses (474 and 6,100 dead, respectively).

¹⁰⁰ Manchester, William. Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. Ltd., 1980. 210.

whatever weapons they had, rifle, grenade, or bamboo spear.”¹⁰¹ A great many soldiers considered the prospect of a full scale land invasion nothing more than a death sentence, a fight where they would be doomed not only by the empirics of the battle – the logistics of gaining ground in an invasion – but also by the attitude of those they fought. As the above quote demonstrates, the soldiers, at least to some degree, considered every citizen of Japan, civilian or soldier, to be a potential opponent. The kamikaze, the image they created and the impact it had upon the minds of these soldiers and sailors, was in part responsible for this perception.

The soldiers, being engaged in battle against the Japanese, developed a different opinion of them than the general American populace, separated from the frontline by an ocean and a great many miles. Those soldiers who were directly engaged in combat were understandably affected by their combat experience, while those removed from the front developed an opinion fed more by propaganda and media than first-hand accounts. Soldiers tended to develop a blunter, harsher view of the Japanese, tempered by their personal experiences and, as a result of those opinions, embraced the atomic bomb as a herald of the end of the war: ““But for the atomic bombs,...I don’t think we would have stood a cat in hell’s chance. We would have been murdered in the biggest massacre of the war. They would have annihilated the lot of us.””¹⁰² The language this military official uses is telling: is it not killed but “murdered” and not defeat but “massacre.” The words take on an extremely

¹⁰¹ Fussell, Paul. “Thank God for the Atomic Bomb.” Thank God for the Atomic Bomb and Other Stories. New York: Summit Books, 1988. 17.

¹⁰² Ibid. 20.

personal tone, and provide us with an idea of the level of mental and emotional involvement of each soldier in the war. Their experiences colored their thoughts and their perceptions.

The language used when speaking of the kamikaze directly reflects this same degree of psychological investment and the manner in which the pilots were viewed, even retrospectively. “The bomb saved the lives not of any imperialists but only of the low and humble...the conscripted enlisted men manning the fated invasion divisions and the sailors crouching at their gun-mounts in terror of the Kamikazes.”¹⁰³ The kamikaze were hardly the only threat the American naval forces, even those who remained strictly at sea and never went ashore, faced. Yet it was an image constantly and consistently summoned when looking at the accounts of American soldiers. Here, the fresh-faced young naval recruit, crouched in terror at the mere thought of the dreaded attack from the skies, had been saved by the surrender the two atomic bombs have created. It was a compelling image, and one that cast the kamikaze, as the terror from the skies, in a malevolent light, as if they were winged terror swooping down upon the sailors.

However, that somewhat malevolent image is to be expected from those who directly fought in the battles. William Manchester provided a concise description of how the potentiality of a kamikaze attack weighed on the minds of American (and British) soldiers and sailors: “confront massed suicide attacks called...“floating chrysanthemums.” Ultimately they failed, but anyone who saw a bluejacket who had been burned by them, writhing in

¹⁰³ Ibid. 23.

agony under his bandages, never again slandered the sailors who stayed on ships while the infantrymen hit the beach....A casualty list which may be unique in the history of naval warfare.”¹⁰⁴ Manchester’s book is littered with the languages and epithets of a soldier: he refers to the Japanese forces as “Japs” or “Nips,” and details the actualities of combat in realistic and oftentimes bloody detail. In his mention of the kamikaze pilots, they are presented as he saw them: pilots – soldiers – who did extraordinary things that left an indelible imprint upon his psyche and his memories, as they did to any who saw their planes descend. In remembering the kamikaze died in their attack runs, he does not forget, and indeed, reminds the reader, that they killed as well, taking the lives of many American soldiers and destroying entire ships if they were successful enough. They injured a great many more, maimed them with the fires the burning remains of their Ohka planes created. Manchester conjures up that image, infusing it not with malice but with honesty, the truth of the matter as he saw it.

While Manchester may not appear to demonstrate any particular sense of animosity for the pilots beyond what could be expected from a soldier on the opposite side of the battlefield, this did not hold true for all of the available accounts. Some sailors viewed the kamikaze planes as personal attacks directed at them and their ships, which, to be fair, from a certain perspective they were. Targets were carefully chosen and any attack that attempted to inflict psychological scarring on an opponent as well as purely physical harm

¹⁰⁴ Manchester, William. Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. Ltd., 1980. 355-356.

by nature became a personal attack. As such, their recollections are colored with this sense of almost-malice, of escaping death narrowly at the hands of fanatics. The very title of the collection of accounts reflects this attitude: “The Sacrificial Lambs” (Who Fought Like Lions): US Destroyers vs. Japanese Kamikaze – the True Story Screaming to be Told. This work, a collection of first-hand accounts collated by a sailor, Bill Sholin, who fought in the battle for Okinawa, is rife with feelings that, despite being decades old, are still potent.

The book covers the battle of Okinawa, focusing on the struggles the sailors encountered while the American forces captured the island. The battle for Okinawa was, as a whole, a tremendously vicious and bloody encounter, with a total of 12,281 American and 188,136 Japanese fatalities.¹⁰⁵ One of the largest and most horrific losses of life was the enormous number of Japanese civilian casualties, nearly identical to the number of Japanese military deaths. The battle turned the island into a hell, with extreme and unnecessary loss of life and terrible destruction. Furthermore, the misconceived Japanese notions of the nature of the American soldiers – that they would torture and painfully execute any captured Japanese – led to

¹⁰⁵ Leckie, Robert. Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II. New York: Viking. 1995.

A further breakdown of the fatalities of the Battle of Okinawa:

| | | |
|-----------|----------------|---------|
| Japanese: | Imperial Army: | 94,136 |
| | Civilians: | 94,000 |
| | Total: | 188,136 |
| American: | Army: | 4,582 |
| | Marine Corps: | 2,792 |
| | Navy: | 4,907 |
| | Total: | 12,281 |

further tragedies, among them mass suicides of the Japanese civilians.¹⁰⁶

Okinawa set the tone for what America could expect a full-scale land invasion of Japan to be, and the image it created was terrifying.

However, the areas that are most heavily referenced by the book were the kamikaze attacks on ships during the battle itself. The kamikaze were written in an extraordinarily harsh light, seen as brainwashed fighters without mercy, pity, or the shreds of humanity. The attacks are referenced as a “devastation” and a “fanatical, last ditch effort to stop the Americans and save their Empire.”¹⁰⁷ There is no consideration of the kamikaze pilots as people, soldiers who happened to be on the wrong side of the war, but rather a direct focus on what they did. They became a representation and function of the planes they flew instead of an individual and, considering the frame of reference from which these American sailors write, the depiction is unsurprising.

Sholin uses the entire kamikaze program to validate the fanaticism of the Japanese troops and overall populace. The troops were “brainwashed” into becoming “the worst nightmare Naval fighting men have ever faced.”¹⁰⁸ We have here a caricature of the program, much of the legend and little of the reality, but because these men believed in it, it became true. Through the media and remembered accounts, it was possible to construct an image that,

¹⁰⁶ Higa, Tomiko. The Girl with the White Flag: An Inspiring Story of Love and Courage in War Time. Trans. Dorothy Britton. New York: Kodansha International, 1991. 48.

¹⁰⁷ Sholin, William. “The Sacrificial Lambs” (Who Fought like Lions). US Destroyers vs. Japanese Kamikazes: The True Story Screaming to be Told. Boulder: Mountain View Books, 1989. 36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 37.

while not at all the reality of the situation, was strong enough, and imbued with enough power that it became truth. The kamikaze were and remain a bold and terrifying example of war, and Sholin described many of the elements that fix them in history and image: their devotion, the extreme – and to Americans, inexplicable – nature of the attacks themselves, the visceral reactions to the damage they did. Approximately 90 percent of all kamikaze attack runs ended in failure, but the successful ten percent was more than enough to create and affirm their image.

Not an Enemy: the Naturalization and Humanization of the Kamikaze

In thinking on the kamikaze in modern times, the idea of a ruthless fanatic is not the most common response. There is a sense of nobility associated with the kamikaze, a bravery and selflessness heightened through comparison to modern-day terrorists, a point that will be examined later in further depth. The question, therefore, lies with how the kamikaze image progresses from the rather harsh propaganda-fed perception seen during and following the war to become the nobler figure of more recent times. Through tracing the usage of the word “kamikaze” in popular media – particularly through newspaper articles – the shift in the perception of the kamikaze over time can be clearly tracked and documented.

During World War II, Japan was first and foremost the enemy, and the kamikaze pilots were a new and unfamiliar weapon. Thus, from the beginning information disseminated to the American public concerning the kamikaze was not entirely correct, and stated they were: “trained youths of 18 to 20. The planes were described as practically flying bombs, carrying just enough fuel to reach their target and named kamikaze for the Japanese god of the winds.”¹⁰⁹ From the beginning the concept was an alien one: a pilot whose only function was to attack without regard for his own life. While the article lacked the sense of malice and awed disbelief consistently seen later on, of the major facts listed both the description of fuel and the source of the name kamikaze itself were incorrect. Kamikaze pilots carried enough fuel for the return voyage, in part as a precaution in case they were incapable of making their attack run and had to return to base. Furthermore, the assumption of the word kamikaze as a Japanese god portrayed the kamikaze as religious figures, blinded by faith. At this stage in the war and the employment of the special attack forces, information concerning them was minimal. What the media did not know they constructed out of whatever source material was available; however, why was the particular image of a soldier with strong religious beliefs created?

There was a repetition and continuation of the image of pilots as men flying planes rife with bombs¹¹⁰ for several months, during which the image did not expand from that. They remained static figures: a threat and a

¹⁰⁹ “Tokyo Tells of ‘Suicide Plane.’” New York Times, 3 Nov 1944

¹¹⁰ “Bombers Raid Tokyo, Japs Say: Navy Destroys 2594 Planes in 60 days.” Los Angeles Times, 1 Nov 1944.

peculiarity, but not much else. As the months progressed new facets of the kamikaze image developed, the first of which dealt with the inherent fanaticism seen in the general attack strategy. Initially, it was not viewed in a fanatical light, but rather was seen as an inevitable conclusion of Japan's position in the war: the kamikaze became Japan's strongest and final hope because, from the American view, Japan's losing was already predetermined. The spirit which imbued the kamikaze was all Japan had to offer, even at this point.¹¹¹ Japan could not win and thus must pin all of its hopes on one utterly alien and insensible scheme.

However, as the war progresses, the kamikaze pilots become strongly associated with what Americans saw as inherent Japanese fanaticism. While the pilots were the foremost representations of that fanaticism and desperation, America also transferred those facets of the kamikaze image to its perception of the Japanese as a whole. Beginning around April of 1945, the tone of articles shifted to a more derisive view of the pilots as well as the program. It was inefficient and ineffectual: "pushed back upon their inner defenses, the Japanese have resorted to fanatical methods which, from a purely military viewpoint, are of doubtful value."¹¹² The pilots themselves were described as "inexperienced, inadequately trained and using obsolete planes... scared to death but intent on their mission."¹¹³ By degrading the nature and

¹¹¹ "Suicide Flyers will win war, Jap diet told." Chicago Daily Tribune 28 Dec 1944.

¹¹² "Japanese 'Suicide' Air War Fails in Mission, Says Admiral Nimitz. Pilots have not Sunk one Battleship, Fast Carrier or Cruiser, He Says – Those who Survive are Willing Prisoners." New York Times, 14 April 1945.

¹¹³ Dopking, Al. "Yanks Pile up Scores on Nip Suicide Pilots." Los Angeles Times, 6 May 1945.

effectiveness of the program, the media could simultaneously deride both Japan's military and the country itself as the two were viewed as nearly inseparable from each other. This perspective was in direct contrast to the division of "Nazis" and "Germany" found on the eastern front. The attitude was unsurprising as Japan was still an alien concept at that time; the Meiji Revolution and complete opening of Japan to the west culminated in 1868, less than eighty years before World War II. In one lifetime Japan could not have hoped to have gone from a foreign, alien nation to an understood and accepted one: "oriental" still meant exotic, unfamiliar, strange.

In the later days of May of 1945, an interesting dichotomy emerged in the articles and public perception of the pilots. While earlier the planes and their attacks were dismissed out of hand as ineffective, they garnered more attention and significance, a shift in opinion that was timed with the Battle of Okinawa. While the American casualties were a mere fraction of the Japanese, the bloody toll was still a shock to the populace and one that became immediately associated with the attention-grabbing techniques of the pilots. Most of casualties were not a result of kamikaze or kaiten (suicide submarine) attacks, but the special attack forces became a prominent and memorable example for the populace. The media created the image of American forces persevering despite repeated attacks from the kamikaze,¹¹⁴ pushing through the attack against the odds and sustaining losses in the process. These losses were consistently attributed to suicide attacks alone¹¹⁵ and in May and June of

¹¹⁴ "Kamikaze: Japan fights fiercely." New York Times 20 May 1945.

¹¹⁵ "Navy Losses Heavy to Suicide Foemen." New York Times 17 May 1945.

1945, we can see the links that formed, connecting the actions of the suicide pilots to those of all Japanese. The kamikaze attacks that occurred before and during the Battle of Okinawa became a template for American thought concerning what Japan was and how the military could and could not handle the Japanese: “he [the Japanese] fought harder and with greater canniness¹¹⁶ – and, of course, with total disregard of all the rules and with the trickiness that characterizes the Japanese and copperheads.”¹¹⁷ Because the kamikaze pilots were the most visible representation of the Japanese populace as a whole, they became a focal point for a great many of the American feelings concerning the war. Targeting the faceless mass of “the Japanese” was a difficult and nebulous concept, but by localizing it and concentrating the image onto the pilots themselves, the American media and military had a much easier image to strike at.

The tactics themselves were also criticized, more often than not on account of their fanaticism. The kamikaze were deemed a nuisance and “a malignant cancer, which is eating up the Japanese body,” or “a self-defeating program...the Japanese themselves are eliminating their own air power.”¹¹⁸ So while there was a disregard for the Japanese’s military ability in regards to the kamikaze, there was also a curious sense of relief for it. The special attack forces was a program so ridiculous that it destroyed itself; a statement that ran counter to the prior ideal of the kamikaze attacks as one of the most horrific and terrible events a sailor could witness or experience. A “massacre” and act

¹¹⁶ “Halsey Pounds Japs Again; Dares Enemy Fleet to Fight.” Los Angeles Times 4 Jun 1945.

¹¹⁷ Rae, Bruce. “Okinawa is a lesson for invasion of Japan.” New York Times 27 May 1945.

¹¹⁸ “Shock and Flame – the Kamikaze Strike.” New York Times 1 Jul 1945.

of “devastation” is hardly the image one conjures when thinking of a “self-defeating program.” Regardless, the two images did coexist, inhabiting the same time frame and general consensus of thought.

These two opinions were far easier to reconcile than another set that developed. In one view, the actions of the kamikaze pilots, and by extension the Japanese, were underhanded, vicious, savage and cowardly, while the other side stated they deserved merit and possessed some inherent military virtue. What is most surprising about the first set of views is the vicious nature of the commentary concerning it: “I don’t care when they choose,’ added the officer... ‘They are a brutal, savage, vicious race and I think the world would be a lot better off if a good many of them were exterminated.’”¹¹⁹ Here, when asked to discuss the surrender and cessation of hostilities with Japan, the sailor instead stated that he did not care when Japan surrendered, or if they even bothered to at all. As far as he was concerned, the longer America fought with Japan the more of an opportunity he would have to “exterminate” them. When he spoke such, he included the entirety of Japan, not merely the military forces. Others compound upon this view, with “victory formulas” such as “kill more Japs and sink more ships.”¹²⁰

There was a definite negative trend to this set of articles. As the idea and image of the kamikaze became incorporated into the American representation of the Japanese as fanatical savages, it became much simpler to think of them as something other than human, and thus far easier to hate. The

¹¹⁹ “Admiral Says Japs Face Death or Surrender.” Los Angeles Times, 27 Jun 1945.

¹²⁰ “Halsey’s Carrier Fleet Hits Nip Suicide Bases.” Los Angeles Times 3 Jun 1945.

terminology used is of note: aside from a liberal and frequent use of the negative slang “Japs” and “Nips” to refer to the Japanese, the articles speak of exterminating them, as if they were something unnatural to be destroyed. The media created this image because of its belief that the kamikaze program was unnatural, and any country that would create and endorse it must be equally so. The Japanese were “hypnotized into killing themselves rather than surrender. Civilians, even Japanese civilians, are different.”¹²¹ Even this image, however, must combat with the already developing concept of Japanese civilians readily taking up arms, “ready and eager to defend their homeland.”¹²² This article, which describes the brutal efficiency of the Japanese forces, here couches it in terms the American public can understand. The terrible events of the Battle of Okinawa and the civilian combat that occurred in it become more understandable if it was done in the name of nationalism and in defense of their homeland.

A media also began to show a gentler, less violent side to the kamikaze, describing them as individuals and even publishing poems one had written before his final, fatal sortie.

When I fly the skies
 What a fine burial place
 Would be the top of a cloud.¹²³

The image here is hardly of a mindless, brainwashed automaton, a fanatical cog in the machine of the Japanese army. An automaton is not capable of expressing himself poetically; he has no such emotions to express.

¹²¹ “The Japanese Bluff.” New York Times 27 Jun 1945.

¹²² Rae, Bruce. “Okinawa is a Lesson for Invasion of Japan.” New York Times 27 May 1945.

¹²³ “A Kamikaze Farewell.” New York Times 26 Jun 1945.

Through illustrating another side of the kamikaze pilots, the media accorded them another dimension as individuals.

From a purely militaristic standpoint, the kamikaze were effective enough, or perhaps merely memorable enough, to form the basis for a counter-opinion of respect: “the Japanese still have a lot of good pilots and...some of their late model planes are mighty good; mighty fast.”¹²⁴ This opinion, sometimes held by sailors closely engaged in the Pacific campaign, afforded the Japanese admiration for the intrinsic merits and outstanding qualities of their attack strategies. While they still clearly remained the enemy, there was now a camaraderie-born esteem for them: despite being on different sides, they both fought in the same war. This initial image developed as the war ended and the physical reality of the kamikaze as a military corps was left behind. When examining the *word*, divorced from the war which spawned its American usage, it is easy to see the new connotations it develops.

New Words: English Assimilates the Kamikaze

English is an amorphous, adaptive language; it grows beyond its original confines through adapting the words of other languages it encounters, absorbing them into its own vocabulary until they are naturalized. Many words have met this fate, “kamikaze” among them. Following the end of the war, the *New York Times* printed an article detailing the new words that World

¹²⁴ Palmer, Kyle. “‘Rattler’ Squadron Bags Japs 124 to 0.” Los Angeles Times 28 Jun 1945.

War II had incorporated into the English language, both American and British. By its account, some 5,000 new words had been introduced, and while most were fated to fade into linguistic obscurity, others would survive. The list of the likely survivors lists words such as “banzai,” “blitzkrieg,” and “gung ho.” “Kamikaze” also appears, with the accompanying definition of “(Japanese, ‘divine wind’) Japanese suicide plane and pilot.”¹²⁵ After the war there were no longer physical examples of the kamikaze extant, and as such the image of the special attack corps became further disassociated from its historical reality.

During the war, we saw several different actualizations of the special attack corps but all of them were closely linked to the physical, tangible pilots the American forces fought. Despite being portrayed in different lights, the term kamikaze universally meant the actual plane and the man who flew it. However, as both the plane and the man left their roles, the word was allowed to evolve independently of its original function, and acquired new meanings. In fact, a simple search of the Oxford English Dictionary reveals new meanings for the word:

Kamikaze

Function: *noun*

1 : ‘The wind of the gods’

2a: one of the Japanese airmen who in the war of 1939-45 made deliberate suicidal crashes into enemy ships

2b: An Aircraft, usually loaded with explosives, used in such an attack

Function: *adjective*

1 : of, pertaining to, or characteristic of a *kamikaze*

2 : reckless, dangerous, or potentially self-destructive

¹²⁵ Bender, Dr. James F. “Thirty Thousand New Words.” New York Times 2 Dec 1945.

While the first of the definitions – the usage of kamikaze as a noun – is similar to what we have seen, the second of the adjectival descriptions is both innovative and incomplete. Innovative because now the word kamikaze can be used to describe other actions similar in scope to the original image of their mission, but not the missions themselves. The definition remains incomplete, as it fails to actualize everything that is invoked when one references the kamikaze, or refers to a thing as “kamikaze.” There is a certain sense of nobility associated with the kamikaze in modern-day renditions; men who died bravely and selflessly. A point of interest is precisely when and how fanaticism became selflessness in media perceptions, and thus how the kamikaze acquired a sense of deeper respect and honor.

The first step in that process was to accord the kamikaze a sense of humanity. Over the course of the war a great deal of time and effort was spent turning Japan and its citizens into savage beasts: monstrous monkeys or treacherous snakes but following the war there was a reversal of that image. In domesticating Japan, the Occupation turned it into something amiable and charming. The September issue of the *Leatherneck* magazine, immediately following Japan’s surrender, displayed Japan in its familiar simian visage, but as a harmless chimp, imbued with all the intimidating presence of a stuffed animal (see Figure 4). The Japan-monkey is perched on the American G.I.’s shoulder, cradled by the laughing soldier.¹²⁶ Turned into a pet, Japan is sullen

¹²⁶ Dower, John W. War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. 186.

but restrained and incapable of any action. In neutering the image of Japan, it became genial and accessible to the public.

American media also extended this socialization to the kamikaze. Following the war, reports delved further into the nature of the kamikaze program, and revealed that the program was not strictly volunteer, as had originally been thought: “none of the veteran Japanese fliers wanted to be a Kamikaze pilot because most of them had children.”¹²⁷ By making the program mandatory, even if only in part, the people who participated in it were much easier to understand. It was easy to hate the military which forced them into such a program, particularly as the Occupation forces were busy dismantling it. The voluntary nature of the special attack corps was one of the aspects of the program that the American viewpoint had the most difficulty reconciling; however, this article proposed a solution to that problem which simply removed the issue itself entirely.

Additional media releases changed the image of the kamikaze to a greater extent, allowing the American populace to further accept the corps. Two concepts were introduced: the first that the kamikaze pilots could turn back and “[return] from unsuccessful missions without disgrace.”¹²⁸ Prior to this, the prevailing thought concerning the missions of the kamikaze was that they were determined once they had taken off; the American media released the “fact” that the pilots did not even have enough fuel to return to base should they need to abort their mission. That idea helped to create the image

¹²⁷ “Japanese Pilots Balked at Service as Kamikaze.” New York Times 7 Sep 1945.

¹²⁸ “Kamikaze Fliers Jumped 2 Grades – Posthumously.” New York Times 23 Sep 1945.

of the corps as condemning the pilots to death whether they could complete their mission or not, fostering an inhuman ideal. By refuting the original fact, the image itself was also refuted, and the kamikaze became a more humanized ideal.

The second concept introduced was that the kamikaze pilots received “the same pay as ordinary pilots...and the promise of two grades’ promotion – posthumously.”¹²⁹ While this may appear to be a strange incentive to change opinion, this revelation helped to further explain the reasoning behind the actions of the kamikaze pilots. Much of the hatred and negative views of the pilots resulted from the inability of the American populace to understand the motivations of the kamikaze. Without that grounding them, the American media constructed its own reasons for the pilots’ actions, and they ran toward the fantastical and fanatical more often than not. The increase in rank may not seem like such an outstanding source of motivation, but the posthumous rank increase also meant an increase in the pay awarded to the family of the deceased, affording them greater financial comfort and security. In this manner, the pilot could continue to take care of his family even after his death in a selfless act of considerable nobility. This self-serving nobility began to permeate the entire kamikaze image.

Now that the kamikaze had, to a degree, become humanized, the American public needed to become familiar with the pilots in order to accept them. Like the English language itself, American society had the ability to integrate and assimilate novel concepts, provided that society had been given

¹²⁹ Ibid.

enough time to familiarize itself with the new idea. One of the major steps in this familiarization process occurred when Mr. and Mrs. Robert Johnstone, whose son had died in the war, established a scholarship with the ten thousand dollars the military afforded them upon their son's death. This scholarship, an idea suggested by their son before he died, had a singular aim: to send a young Japanese man to college in America, thus hoping to foster communication and good will between the two countries.¹³⁰ This alone would have been extraordinary, coming as it did in the years immediately following the war, but the Japanese man selected was a former Kamikaze pilot. Robert Yukimasa Nishiyama, then twenty-two, had transferred into the special attack corps but the war ended before he could be sent on sortie. While a kamikaze attack did not kill the Johnstone's son, the kamikaze were emblematic of the Japanese military as a whole. To invite and sponsor a kamikaze pilot to America for school was more or less equivalent to financing the education of their son's killer. However, the article did not address the issue in the terms of killer and slain (terms seen frequently in articles written during the war) but rather speaks of the opportunity to increase relations between the two countries and the opportunities and hopes of Nishiyama, which he intended to accomplish by studying in an American university.

This article illustrated the first and most visible step in acquainting the kamikaze to the American public. With his coming to America, Nishiyama could be regarded as another person, a soldier from an opposing army, but an

¹³⁰ "Japanese Ex-Suicide Pilot Will Study Here as Memorial to U.S. Private Killed on Luzon." New York Times 4 Jan 1947.

intrinsically human as any other. He had a family and plans for the future; all aspects of his life were independent of his identity in the war. Before, they never would have mattered: his self as a kamikaze pilot is all that would have been important. As the Japanese became human, so did the kamikaze pilots. However, as the kamikaze had represented Japan during the war, they did so again and changes concerning the public image on Japan as a whole were first expressed in regards to the most outstanding characteristics and members of society.

The exploits of the kamikaze pilots during the war began to garner military merit and regard in the years following the war. Learning from the damage sustained during the war, the navy designed new ships to counter kamikaze-style attacks: “lessons learned from kamikaze attacks in the Pacific were responsible for the Oriskany’s sturdier decks.”¹³¹ In designing a new aircraft carrier, the military also acknowledged the kamikaze had posed enough of a threat during the war to merit a ship that could easily withstand their force. In addition to the new carrier, the navy also designed a new type of anti-aircraft gun “capable of warding off even kamikaze attacks.”¹³² While this was developed to defend against future attacks of like nature, it also indicated, once again, the respect accorded to those attacks.

As time passed and the American public began to integrate a sense of respect for the kamikaze, the military in particular became less hesitant about expressing this regard: “I think you will never do everything with missiles.

¹³¹ “Carrier Oriskany put into Service.” New York Times 26 Sep 1950.

¹³² “Navy Gun Can Balk Suicide Attack.” New York Times 14 Mar 1955.

The best guidance system in the world was produced by the little Japanese mother who spawned a son to ride in a kamikaze.”¹³³ The overall shift in perception was enormous: barely a decade after the war the kamikaze pilots had become so revered that members of the same military that once denounced them as ineffectual cowards now praised them as the most successful of weapons. America had naturalized and accepted the word “kamikaze” and the idea behind it to the point where the pilots could be thought of with respect.

There exist further examples of how the word “kamikaze” itself became detached from the original historical antecedent. Through alternative uses of the word we can see how it developed as an appellation for a foolish person or action, evolved from but also divorced of the original context. When Newbold Morris ran for governor’s office in October of 1945, his opponents thought he had no chance at victory, and expressed their opinion by referring to him as the: “the Kamikaze candidate.”¹³⁴ Here, the use of kamikaze clearly indicated his opponents believed his election campaign to be a fruitless, hopeless, endeavor; regardless, it is notable in its use of kamikaze outside of the immediate military context. This usage was new and almost peculiar for the time: the article appears to focus more on the use of the word kamikaze than on any of the politician’s party platforms.

After the initial shock at its use faded, the media applied the kamikaze appellation to a number of different situations. Among the most interesting of

¹³³ “Missiles Will Not Supplant Planes Soon, Experts Say.” New York Times 8 Apr 1957.

¹³⁴ “Kamikaze Label Applied to Morris.” New York Times 14 Oct 1945.

these is the use of the word in reference to the near-suicidal tactics of Tokyo cab drivers: “Japan’s peacetime ‘kamikaze corps,’ the city’s taxi drivers...their daredevil antics.”¹³⁵ While the reference is important, the article is also particular in that it defines the term kamikaze itself. Written in 1958, barely a decade removed from the kamikaze and the end of the war, the general opinion is such that the article’s writer felt the need to define the historical basis for the word itself. The question then becomes: is a span of thirteen years long enough for the populace to forget the kamikaze, or has the absorption of the word divorced it from its historical precedent? The latter seems the more likely case, as the historical kamikaze have lost a measure of importance and significance in the eyes of the public. However, as the next chapter will illustrate, they were not forgotten.

¹³⁵ Trumbell, Robert. “Taxi Crash Rate High in Japan.” New York Times 18 Mar 1958.

V: A Modern View – the Kamikaze Pilots in the Wake of 9/11

As the image of the kamikaze changed and evolved over time, so did the image and meaning behind words such as “suicide attack” or “suicide bomber.” At the beginning of World War II and thus media coverage concerning the kamikaze, the media utilized the term in a straightforward description of what the kamikaze, as pilots and soldiers, did. Over time, that word and its usage shifted as the kamikaze acquired a sense of nobility and the word itself became more inclusive and applicable as a descriptive term for a myriad of ends. Later, as the term became divorced from its origins the intensity of its meaning began to fade, until the word could, and was, thrown about as a part of everyday English speech, without a great deal of regard for the original historical precedent. The regularity of occurrence and importance of the term even began fade slightly, as it was used less and less frequently over the decades.

The kamikaze image and its use came into defined focus after the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. The methodology of the kamikaze pilots and the hijackers were similar enough to revive interest in the kamikaze themselves and draw comparisons between the two. At this point, kamikaze as a term had become removed from its historical precedent, the context for its use and the images it referenced suddenly become very important. When the media referred to the suicide bombers and hijackers of September 11th as kamikaze, it became important to consider how deep that comparison went.

In comparing the suicide bombers and the kamikaze, on some level the media also equated the two of them. Furthermore, following the 9/11 attacks, there immediately surfaced comparisons and allusions to Pearl Harbor and World War II as a whole as well as to the kamikaze. To be certain, these comparisons can be viewed as the direct result of the obvious physical similarities between the two events: both groups used planes as weapons, both attacks were undeclared aggressions, surprise attacks on American soil, and furthermore, the only attacks on American soil since the beginning of the 20th century. While these similarities were prominent, there were differences between the two situations which must also be considered.

In the last chapter, we examined how the media created and crafted the image of the kamikaze through its use and representation in popular articles and the common view. The government's and media's constant allusion to aspects of World War II after 9/11 was as constructed and deliberate as the evolution of the kamikaze image in the years following 1945. In linking 9/11 and Pearl Harbor, the media could fortify and simplify the image of the former through the perspective of the latter. Pearl Harbor had a preexisting image with an established public response, and through connecting the two 9/11 could share that same preconditioned reaction in the public.

Pearl Harbor: "A Date Which Will Live in Infamy"

The surprise attack on the military installation of the island of Oahu began America's involvement in the Pacific Campaign of World War II as well as heralding the start of Japan's attack on America. While undeniably the most famous of the early battles of the war, Pearl Harbor was only the beginning: a Japanese attack on the Philippines commenced almost immediately after the attack on Oahu. Pearl Harbor summons many images, but perhaps one of the most enduring comes from President Roosevelt's speech the day after the event:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation... toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific... during the intervening time the Japanese Government had deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

...Always will be remembered the character of the onslaught against us. No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.¹³⁶

This speech delineated the key points of the attack itself as well as the ideas that remained enmeshed in the American psyche of the time. The Japanese were treacherous snakes, to attack without warning and thus in clear defiance of the established rules of military conduct. Two-faced, they pleaded for peace while simultaneously planning to attack. Prior to Pearl Harbor, America fought its battles on foreign soil: American soldiers may have died in great numbers during the European Campaign, but those deaths occurred an

¹³⁶ "Pearl Harbor – FDR's 'Day of Infamy' Speech." 14 Mar 2007. <<http://www.umkc.edu/lib/spec-col/ww2/PearlHarbor/fdr-speech.html>>.

ocean away, on the shores and lands of Europe. While Hawai'i was removed from the mainland, it was still considered a part of America. However, American intelligence was not entirely unaware of the potential of an attack on Pearl Harbor. While publicly viewed as a surprise attack, there were warnings in the events leading up to the attack that gave American military reason to suspect something could occur. On April 1st of 1941, Japan had mobilized a combined fleet, composed primarily of carriers with Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo (one of the commanders of the Pearl Harbor attack) placed at its head.¹³⁷ While there was an initial scramble to assemble the mass of airplanes for the attacks, Japan had its troops ready to move out by the 22nd of November, 1941.¹³⁸

By 1941, it was becoming readily apparent to the American side war was an inevitability: the only true question remaining was when and what the final event to spark the conflict would be.¹³⁹ America kept a close watch on Japanese communications and events, officers “had the approval of the Attorney General to tap the telephone wires and to intercept telephone

¹³⁷ The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside the Japanese Plans. Ed. Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon. New York: Brassey's, 1993. 10.

From this source we also learn the composition of the fleet, the First Air Fleet. Note that CV indicates carrier variant, CVL carrier variant light: both are types of aircraft carriers.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 st Carrier Division: | CV's <i>Akagi</i> and <i>Kaga</i> | 4 Destroyers |
| 2 nd Carrier Division: | CV's <i>Soryu</i> and <i>Hiryu</i> | 4 Destroyers |
| 4 th Carrier Division: | CVL <i>Ryujo</i> | 2 Destroyers |

It is of note that all of these carriers save *Ryujo* would be destroyed in the Battle of Midway.

¹³⁸ Report of Army Pearl Harbor Board. Washington DC: Government Printing Office. 1944. 98.

¹³⁹ Clearly, as the preparations for the Pearl Harbor attack took several months, the Japanese side had already realized the inevitability of war with America, and was preparing accordingly.

conversations,”¹⁴⁰ and from that intelligence, had an idea of the potentiality of a Japanese attack or strike which would give cause to instigate hostilities in the Pacific. Radio transmissions intercepted in the days before the attack on Pearl Harbor indicated movement of a number of Japanese ships, and placed their eventual destination as the waters north of Hawai’i.¹⁴¹ What America did not know was the specifics of this supposed strike, or the degree to which it would damage the American forces. However, in the eyes of the American military, if the situation between Japan and America were, as reports appeared to indicate, to escalate to conflict, it would be better for Japan to make the initial attack, thus giving America free leave to retaliate against them.

The Japanese fleet was indeed massive: the six carriers launched over 300 warplanes at the harbor, dropping a number of bombs on hangers and the large carriers, most positioned close to each other in a configuration called “battleship row.” The carriers released these fighters in three waves, sustaining a constant attack for the entire duration of the assault. At the same time, a large submarine fleet of thirty full-sized submarines and five midget submarines launched torpedoes at the ships: the fleet itself was strategically positioned in order to trap any ships attempting to escape the attacked harbor.¹⁴² The strike was well-planned and executed, although the Japanese focused predominantly on the large aircraft carriers, which they believed were the backbone of any country’s navy, including their own, instead of

¹⁴⁰ Stinnett, Robert B. Day of Deceit: the Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor. New York: Free Press, 2000. 101.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 189.

¹⁴² The Pearl Harbor Papers: Inside the Japanese Plans. Ed. Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon. New York: Brassey’s, 1993. 304.

destroying structural installations, such as the hangers themselves or fuel reserves on site. An attack of targeting those installations would have caused more damage than resulted from the Pearl Harbor attack. However, the Japanese executed the attack itself with such precision that the attacking forces suffered very few casualties or damage to their ships and planes. After the attack, they were able to withdraw with a force almost entirely intact and without fear of immediate pursuit or retaliation.

The military personnel of Pearl Harbor suffered heavy casualties following the battle: 2,273 Army and Navy men died and another 1,119 were wounded.¹⁴³ Out of the 101 warships located in the harbor, sixteen were severely damaged. Five of the large carriers sustained such severe levels of damage that they were out of commission entirely: *Utah*, *Oklahoma*, *Arizona*, *Cassin* and *Downes*. These were, by far, the most dramatic losses of the attack; however, the Army, Navy, and Marine air bases also lost a combined 188 planes. Many others were damaged, albeit reparably, in the attack.¹⁴⁴ The severity of this damage was all the more remarkable when compared to the duration of the attack: beginning at 8:10 am and ending at approximately 9:25 am, the attack was barely over an hour in length. While the degree of forewarning available to the American military is debatable, to the soldiers and sailors of Pearl Harbor the attack was a decided surprise, a strike which came without warning and left the defending forces scrambling to retaliate.

¹⁴³ The exact number of military and civilian casualties and wounded varies slightly from source to source, but overall falls close to this number. Some estimates range higher by roughly one hundred casualties, and some lower by an equivalent amount.

¹⁴⁴ Stinnett, Robert B. Day of Deceit: the Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor. New York: Free Press, 2000. 248.

However, despite the severity of the effects of the attack of the military personnel, there were few civilian casualties. Pearl Harbor was intended from the beginning to be a purely military strike, and any civilian casualties were accidental, not intentional, and most of the damage was done by the guns fired in retaliation against the attacking Japanese. All told, fifty-nine civilians died in the attack, and while the attack was undeniably horrific, the ratio of civilian to military casualties reiterates the level of precision in the targeting of this attack.

The attack had an effect beyond what the statistics of how many the Japanese killed or injured or how many ships they sank indicated. At its heart, Pearl Harbor effect on the public lay in the photographs and stories that were circulated via the media to the American public, creating a vibrant image of the event which the American public retained. Many of these photographs involved the large aircraft carriers and battleships, prior to this believed to be nigh indestructible. The large aircraft carriers stationed at Pearl Harbor were built to contain enough power to hold up against most enemy attacks. While there was a great deal of planning and preparation involved in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the ease at which they destroyed several of these carriers and destroyers was chilling, as the dramatic visual and anecdotal evidence reflected and reinforced. When the *USS Arizona's* forward magazine exploded after a bombing run, the ship burned and exploded, causing nearly half of the casualties of the entire assault. After being bombed and torpedoed, the *USS Utah* burned and capsized, trapping its sailors within

it as they struggled to escape the doomed ship.¹⁴⁵ It was these stories which endured after the battle at Pearl Harbor and the images they created were imprinted onto the American consciousness.

September 11th: the World Trade Center

On September 11th, 2001, a group of nineteen hijackers took control of three commercial airplanes and flew them into the two buildings of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, killing everyone on board as well as a substantial number of civilians at the sites. Another plane had a like destination in mind but the intervention of the passengers derailed the terrorists' plans, and the plane consequently crashed into a field in Pennsylvania without reaching its intended target: all those on board died in the crash.¹⁴⁶ These surprise attacks against the United States were seen as all the more insidious because the hijackers overtook American planes and were thus able to turn American equipment into weapons against the nation. The attacks themselves spawned a media storm, giving rise to a wave of domestic and international opinion centered upon the situations leading up to the attack and possible political and military responses to it.

¹⁴⁵ Prange, Gordon W. December 7, 1941: The Day the Japanese Attacked Pearl Harbor. New York: McGraw Hill. 1988. 311

¹⁴⁶ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2004. 13.

While the two planes that hit the pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania (American Airlines Flight 77 and United Airlines Flight 93, respectively) carry great significance and symbolic weight, they often fall to the wayside in contrast to the attacks on the World Trade Center's North and South Towers. American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, each with five hijackers aboard, crashed into the Twin Towers in a fantastic and horrifying display, causing massive structural damage to each tower.¹⁴⁷ In addition to that, each of the jets carried nearly full fuel tanks which, when impacting the buildings, caused fires that burned until the two towers fell, approximately an hour after each impact.¹⁴⁸ When they fell, many civilians as well as rescue workers, firemen, and policemen who were at the time working to retrieve the trapped people, died: the final American death count, including those that died in the hijacked planes themselves, was 2,819.¹⁴⁹ Of that number, 2,416 were civilians; the remaining 403 casualties were all official workers of some sort, be it firemen, paramedics, or policemen. From the standpoint of lives lost, 9/11 was the greater tragedy, and claimed more lives than Pearl Harbor did. However, nearly all of those lives were those of civilians, whereas the vast majority of casualties at Pearl Harbor were military casualties, most occurring when the Japanese bombed the large carriers.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 11.

¹⁴⁸ United Flight 175 struck the south tower at 9:03 am, and the tower fell at 9:59 am, approximately, thus burning for a time of 56 minutes. In comparison, American Flight 11 struck the north tower at 8:46 am, and the tower fell 102 minutes later, at 10:28 am.

¹⁴⁹ A further breakdown of the casualties:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Total Killed: | 2,819 |
| Firefighters or paramedics: | 343 |
| Police officers: | 60 |

The images that emerged from the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were, in their own way, just as compelling as those which resulted from the attack on Pearl Harbor (see Figure 5). When the Twin Towers fell, it left deep scars not just upon Manhattan, but upon the American psyche as well. Terrorists had attacked America and done great damage in terms of lives, time and money lost, as well as destroying America's sense of security. If buildings like the World Trade Center and the Pentagon could be destroyed so simply, there was no telling what else could happen. Pearl Harbor incited the entrance of America into the Pacific theater of World War II, and America began bombing Afghanistan on October 7th 2001. The shock value prominent in each situation was such that it wielded immense power in evoking a response from the people.

It is unclear precisely how much forewarning the proper American authorities possessed in regards to the September 11th attacks and what they did with the information or lack thereof. According to some sources, by the mid-1990's, "U.S. intelligence agencies had passed on information concerning...early plans by al Qaeda officials to use passenger jets as kamikaze weapons...the possibility of terrorists using hijacked jets against major U.S. buildings had been raised in a public federal-government report in 1999."¹⁵⁰ The possibility for such an attack was always present, but the exact specifics of such an attack – in particular, the when and the where – were unknown until the attack itself. However, the level of intelligence guarding

¹⁵⁰ Paltrow, Scott J. "Kamikaze Terrorism wasn't New Idea; White house Statements Aside, Protective Steps Date Back through Clinton Administration." Wall Street Journal. 1 Apr 2004.

about the attack was not nearly as important as the fact that it was a surprise attack, executed without forewarning, and as such, a most cowardly and devious deed, lacking in honor or upholding any of the proper conduct for war.

Similar but not Equal: Suicide Bombers and the Kamikaze

Before the September 11th attacks, the word “kamikaze” had begun to fade in the collective media and public consciousness. While still employed, it was so divorced from its historical antecedent as to operate nearly independently of it. However, the attacks on the World Trade Center altered this perception. In the wake of those attacks, the meaning behind words became terribly important, and now all of the implications found in such words as “Pearl Harbor” and “kamikaze” were carefully examined and used to evoke the historical precedent. The responses to the attacks of September 11th were varied; ranging from plans of rebuilding and reconstruction to more vitriolic outbursts. In an article entitled “Simply Kill the Bastards,” Steve Dunleavy wrote:

The response to this unimaginable 21st – century Pearl Harbor should be as simple as it is swift – kill the bastards. A gunshot between the eyes, blow them to smithereens, poison them if you have to. As for cities or countries that host these worms, bomb them into basketball courts.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Dunleavy, Steve. “Simply Kill the Bastards.” New York Post. 12 Sep 2001.

The unforgiving tone of this article was not uncommon among post-9/11 reaction pieces. In fact, we can see it clearly mirrored in other articles which portray a similar stance upon the issues:

We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war. And this is war.¹⁵²

While the author of this comment, Ann Coulter, is noted as a bigoted extremist conservative figure, we are not seeking an unbiased, objective opinion. Propaganda existed in response to the 9/11 attacks as much as it was rampant during the years of World War II. The important sections of these two comments, both of which appeared in popular media sources and were widely circulated, is the manner in which they referenced Pearl Harbor.

Coulter referenced World War II and stated how both times – World War II and post-9/11 – were periods of war. However, so were the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War. While World War II stands as the only war in which America was directly attacked, fortifying the connection between it and 9/11, it remains the only war which is mentioned. Dunleavy's article makes an even stronger connection to the era, comparing and equating the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks with Pearl Harbor itself.

This mindset was echoed time and time again: "It's like Pearl Harbor," commented one bystander upon seeing the attack, "It's Pearl Harbor. It's war."¹⁵³ Both attacks were deeply traumatic events which scarred the nation,

¹⁵² Ann Coulter, quoted in: Psychology of Terrorism: Theoretical Understandings and Perspectives. Ed. Chris E. Stout. Vol. III. Westport: Praeger, 2002.

¹⁵³ Kleinfeld, N.R. "Hijacked Jets Destroy Twin Towers and Hit Pentagon in Bay of Terror." New York Times. 12 Sep 2001.

mentally and physically. They stand as the two largest attacks made by foreign forces on American soil, and their surprise element ensured the attacks themselves were indelibly imprinted upon the American consciousness. Both of the attacks had permanent effects on consequences upon America's physical and social landscape: "You always look for those two buildings [the twin towers]. You always know where you are when you see those two buildings. And now they're gone."¹⁵⁴ In the wake of the attacks, points of reference were destroyed and lost, and their destruction resulted in subsequent shifts of the American frame of view. What had been seen as invincible and unassailable was suddenly and tragically fragile.

As the media drew the comparison between World War II and 9/11, so it erected one between suicide bombers and the kamikaze pilots. From outward appearances, it is easy to see why the comparison could be created: both flew planes into their targets in an attempt to inflict damage, and both were determined to die in the attempt before they even began it. Furthermore, the word "kamikaze" had been integrated into mainstream American vocabulary, so it was applicable to a number of different situations, so long as they shared the same outward appearance that was an expected connotation of the word itself. In this, the suicide pilots definitely qualified. Despite this, the two incidents were not the same, and the respective assailants had markedly different goals. Furthermore, the kamikaze pilots had, over the years, acquired a sense of honor and nobility not unlike that which permeated the samurai spirit and concepts of *bushido* they were themselves familiar with.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

By applying the label of kamikaze to the suicide pilots, the media either applied those same principles to the hijackers or removed them from the kamikaze. In some manner, the two groups had to be equated to be compared and that in turn raised questions over what the defining elements of each group was, whether or not they could be compared, and what was achieved through the comparison and equalization of the two.

Those kamikaze pilots who were still alive at the time of 9/11 did not approve of the comparison. They felt it dishonored their name and the names of their comrades who had died during the program. One pilot, Shigeyoshi Hamazono, was eighty-one when, in 2004, he was quoted stating that: “Japan’s originals are insulted to be mentioned in the same breath. ‘When I hear the comparison, I feel so sorry for my friends who died, because our mission was totally different from suicide bombers.’ The kamikaze attacked military targets. In contrast, ‘the main purpose of a suicide bomber is to kill as many innocent civilians as they can. That is just murder.’”¹⁵⁵ Here we see a major distinction drawn between the motivations of the kamikaze pilots and the motivations of the suicide bombers. Existing in a state of war, the pilots were driven by ideas of duty and purely militaristic reasons, and only targeted military installations. In contrast, Hamazono saw the suicide bombers as a lesser soldier, if they could even be called that, desiring only the maximum amount of carnage, and not caring who they had to hurt to inflict it. This distinction is crucial to the man, as it allows his fellow pilots, alive and dead,

¹⁵⁵ Wallace, Bruce. “They’ve outlived the Stigma; Once Pariahs in Japan, ‘Kamikaze Survivors’ are Honored for their Spirit of Sacrifice.” Los Angeles Times. 24 Sep 2004.

to retain a sense of integrity without having to apologize for their actions. They were soldiers in the strictest sense, and followed the orders of their military: “we just obey instructions.” This outlook divorced, to a degree, the kamikaze pilots from the damage incurred in their bombing runs, having not chosen the targets themselves and simply following commands issued from their military leaders. It accords them a sense of duty and thus of honor, which the suicide bombers lack.

However, the precedent the kamikaze pilots created is worth consideration. The pilots drew upon the ideals of *bushido* created by centuries of Japanese history, stories of great Japanese heroes and mythological figures who endured incredible hardships or died nobly for their lord, emperor, and country.¹⁵⁶ Similar to this, through the pilot’s actions, they created an enduring image and a precedent for similar actions in the decades to come. When speaking to Sheik Nasrallah, leader of the Shiite Islamist militia Hezbollah, Naoto Amaki, the former Japanese ambassador to Lebanon told the leader that the kamikaze program was “a lesson in the ultimate futility of violence,” to which Nasrallah disagreed, replying that “we learned how to do suicide missions from the kamikazes...the shiites all commend the Japanese

¹⁵⁶ The samurai who existed in the time where they could be truly active military figures – primarily, prior to the 1600’s and the Battle of Sekigahara, which unified Japan – felt allegiance to the lord of their individual han, and not to the emperor or to a concept of “Japan” as a unified country. This was common amongst the populace of Japan, who were loyal to their individual han, not the country as a whole. After the Meiji Revolution of 1868, the new government tried to change this by integrating the samurai spirit into the populace as a whole and by proclaiming the emperor as a symbol for the entirety of Japan and as focal point for the loyalty of the Japanese, thus a method for the individual hans to truly unite into one unified country.

samurai spirit.”¹⁵⁷ Here, Nasrallah appeared to be referencing the *idea* of the kamikaze as a fanatical group of men who died willingly, even gladly, for their emperor. As we have seen, that is not precisely the reality of the special attack corps, and does not do justice to the individual pilots who served and died in the program. However, the reality of a situation, as is apparent here, carries less weight than the widely-circulated image of it, and that is the image the suicide bombers embraced. And despite the fact that there was clear and present disdain for the suicide bombers, even Hamazono admits that: “Just like suicide bombers...we [the kamikaze] did it out of love for something.”¹⁵⁸ So while the pilots did not believe they are in the same category as the suicide bombers, they did recognize the existence of some similarities between them, and that those similarities are built, in some part, off of the kamikaze image they created. Those similarities may form the basis for the initial comparison, but the effects of that comparison stretched beyond them. Through this comparison, the media attempted to create an image in public opinion, much as it did with the initial image of the kamikaze during World War II. Referencing the kamikaze became another tool to further this end.

Many of the questions raised when these parallels were drawn involved where these similarities end and begin, and what is to be gained from comparing the two. Following 9/11, we see a resurgence in the usage of the word kamikaze, and furthermore, the word being applied to suicide bombers, just as it was originally applied to the pilots themselves. But the comparison

¹⁵⁷ Wallace, Bruce. “They’ve outlived the Stigma; Once Pariahs in Japan, ‘Kamikaze Survivors’ are Honored for their Spirit of Sacrifice.” Los Angeles Times. 24 Sep 2004.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

fails when it comes to the ideology of each group. We can regard the kamikaze and the suicide bombers as truly separate, even conforming to different types of suicide: one being, in the case of the kamikaze, “mass suicide, in which the will to take one’s own life is not so much personal as collective.” However, the other is “suicide terrorism, in which self-destruction is seen not as a solution to personal problems, but as a way of contributing to a cherished political or religio-political outcome.”¹⁵⁹ This distinguishes between the kamikaze and the suicide bombers, marking them apart by their ideology. And in truth, the kamikaze ideology and their methods allowed for them to acquire and maintain a sense of honor and nobility, the likes of which have yet to be accorded to the hijackers.

A large part of this issue lies in the methods used by each: the kamikaze pilots flew Japanese planes from Japanese bases into strictly military targets, while the 9/11 terrorists hijacked American planes and flew them into civilian buildings. Both Pearl Harbor and 9/11 were surprise attacks, but the Pearl Harbor attacks targeted the military installation solely, and none of the surrounding civilian areas were touched. In fact, the few civilian casualties that did result from Pearl Harbor were primarily the result of friendly fire incidents. The 9/11 attacks, on the other hand, were intended from the beginning to target civilian areas: “when asked whether he [Osama bin Laden, militant Islamist who had taken responsibility for the attacks] approved of terrorism and of attacks on civilians he replied: ‘We believe that

¹⁵⁹ Levine, Victor T. “Suicide Terror; the Ancient Tactic is back with Vengeance.” St. Louis Post–Dispatch. 24 Nov 2003.

the worst thieves in the world...are the Americans....We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they are all targets.”¹⁶⁰ He went on to call “for the murder of any American, anywhere on earth, as the ‘individual duty for every Muslim who can do it any country in which it is possible to do it.’”¹⁶¹ We can draw parallels to this type of attitude in World War II, but the most prominent of examples come from the American response to the Japanese. To draw upon a response referenced earlier, one commander stated that: “they [the Japanese] are a brutal, savage, vicious race and I think the world would be a lot better off if a good many of them were exterminated.”¹⁶² The attitude is in some respects similar: the complete alienation of a country and its people to the point where they appear almost sub-human, and are thus much easier to kill. This simplification occurred on both sides of World War II, although the more vitriolic comments we’ve seen originate from American officials. With this ideology in place, it became much easier to target all members of the population, not just military forces.

There are differences as well in the execution of the kamikazes’ actions as opposed to the terrorists’ methods. All of the planes the kamikaze flew were Japanese military aircraft and there was no subterfuge in their attacks. As much as Pearl Harbor was a surprise attack, the fleet that moved across the Pacific to close range for the attack was not disguised as anything

¹⁶⁰ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2004. 47.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 47.

¹⁶² “Halsey’s Carrier Fleet Hits Nip Suicide Bases.” Los Angeles Times. 3 Jun 1945.

but what it was. When the kamikaze performed an attack run, they did not masquerade as civilian aircraft or anything of the sort. In contrast to this, the hijackers overtook American commercial airplanes, threatening the passengers with box cutters, knives, and bomb threats.¹⁶³ They killed passengers and airplane staff in order to gain control of the aircraft. Up until, and to some degree, after, the first plane hit, onlookers were not entirely clear what was going on: “At first we thought it was a plane out of Newark airport that went out of control, and then I watched it happen, the second plane hit the building.”¹⁶⁴ There was a level of subterfuge in the September 11th attacks unseen at Pearl Harbor, and yet the “day that will live in infamy” still summons immediate feelings of treachery and underhanded tactics.

The main point of contention between the kamikaze and the pilots was the ideological differences and motivations driving the two. This difference is based upon the fact that the kamikaze pilots acted as soldiers in a pre-existing war, and only attacked military targets, whilst the hijackers has no such war to justify themselves and engaged civilian targets without warning. The hijackers; however, were not monsters and had their own motivations; they were well educated and intelligent men, something that even American sources admitted, albeit grudgingly.¹⁶⁵ The methods of the men, the belief they had in themselves and their actions, reflects a deep devotion to a cause; to them, they were fighting in a war, even if America did not recognize this

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Allen, Henry. “The Message in the Smoke” The Washington Post. 12 Sep 2001.

¹⁶⁵ Fisk, Robert. “Terror’s Aftermath; Glorious Death: The Kamikaze Impulse.” Los Angeles Times. 16 Sep 2001.

war, they knew and understood where the lines lay, and who was the enemy. When the media and other forces invoke the term jihad,¹⁶⁶ they imply the aggression on the side of the hijackers and the Islamist factions as well as the groups they represented was entirely unfounded and without cause. To them however, the “United States and its allies...have declared war on Islam, true Muslims have no choice but to wage a defensive jihad.”¹⁶⁷ Osama bin Laden is certain to always justify the actions as part of a defensive jihad, placing the blame for any initial strikes on America and countries and peoples aligned with her. In doing this, the hijackers could have a cause to believe in, one they thought was above all else just and true. So although from the American perspective the attacks came out of nowhere, to the hijackers they were already soldiers in a preexisting war. While this makes for justification for the Islamist side, the fact remains that, despite any ideological war that had been, unknowingly or not, declared, the United States and the Islamist groups were not engaged in recognized war, as the kamikaze were. The kamikaze pilots were undeniably soldiers, fighting in a war their country and America had, at that point been waging for over three years. Their actions were the actions of soldiers.

The media had deliberate intentions in drawing comparisons between 9/11 and Pearl Harbor. While the two events were not, as we have seen, truly

¹⁶⁶ The Oxford English dictionary defines Jihad as:

1: A religious war of Muslims against unbelievers in Islam, inculcated as a duty by the Koran and traditions

2: A war or crusade for or against some doctrine, opinion, or principle; war to the death

¹⁶⁷ Hashmi, Sohail H. “9/11 and the Jihad Tradition.” Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11. Ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2006.

similar, the media could construct an image where they were, and where the support rallied for Pearl Harbor and World War II could thus be applied to the events and aftermath of September 11th. This sort of constructed reality, akin to the constructed image of the kamikaze, is given weight and importance by the value placed in it by the public, the strength it carries in the public opinion. Distinct and different as the two event may be, if the media constantly equates them, one begins to acquire the significance of the other.

Perspectives

Outside of purely physical similarities, the comparison between the Islamic terrorists and the kamikaze falls short. When we look beyond the fact that both groups flew planes, and both died in doing so, there are very few similarities between the two. However, in comparing the idea of the kamikaze and the idea of the hijackers, the fanatical and desperate madmen, an idea much like the one of the kamikaze which existed during the war, we can where the parallels can be drawn between the two. Both of these concepts; however, are only perspectives, which change over time as the social conditions that formed them do.

The original idea we looked at was that of the kamikaze as brainwashed fanatics, dying for the emperor without a thought for themselves. However, as analysis of their writings demonstrated, the kamikaze possessed a

great deal more depth than that image, and were well aware of the ramifications of their actions and what they were fighting for. They were not uniformed or brainwashed but fought out of duty, or for their families, or for themselves – there were as many reasons as there were pilots. The media allowed them to regain a sense of nobility, humanity, and individualism after the war, and that process of revision took time. As it stands now, the actions of the terrorists are too fresh in America’s consciousness to so readily explain and validate the hijackers; it may be that that point can never be reached, and does not deserve to be. It is, to some degree, possible to rationalize nearly every action in history, even the atrocities; however, such actions does not make them any less terrible.

Image, as we have seen, is something carefully constructed and maintained. Propaganda is not a haphazard creature, but rather a deliberate creation intended to serve a purpose. In times of war, this purpose is often to rally support for the homeland or against the enemy, to push people into drafts or comply with rationing, and overall to ensure the citizens support their side and dislike, even hate, the “good wars,” the “necessary wars,” wars where it was eminently clear who was fighting whom, and furthermore, who the heroes and the villains were. They fought for grand ideals, like truth and justice and freedom, while the bad guys supported a fascist regime that promoted genocide. In the language of images, the Axis powers wore black coats and mustaches (or in the case of the Japanese, were a race of evil monkeys) and the Allied forces, the “good guys,” stepped in to liberate Europe and Asia

from their clutches. Of course, history is not nearly as neat as that, or as simple, but it is the image that propaganda would have had us believe.

In linking Pearl Harbor and September 11, the media, the government, and society all linked the easy and immediate black-and-white reactions of World War II with the 2001 attacks, and by extension, America's actions in the Middle East following the event. The benefits of this are easy to realize: few, if any, argue that World War II had to be fought, and the war had a level of support from the civilian base that any modern government could envy. But the linking of the two does the kamikaze a disservice, not as much to the image of the pilots, but to the reality of them: brave, educated men, the best and brightest young men in their country, who died protecting it and safeguarding their families.

Appendix: Images

Figure 1: World War II Propaganda, circulated 1942¹⁶⁸



¹⁶⁸ "Image of University of Illinois Image Collection." 10 Feb 2007. <<http://images.library.uiuc.edu>>

Figure 2: Japan's Desperate Struggles¹⁶⁹



¹⁶⁹ Dower, John. War Without Mercy. New York: Pantheon. 1988. 184.

Figure 3: Japan in the Aleutians¹⁷⁰



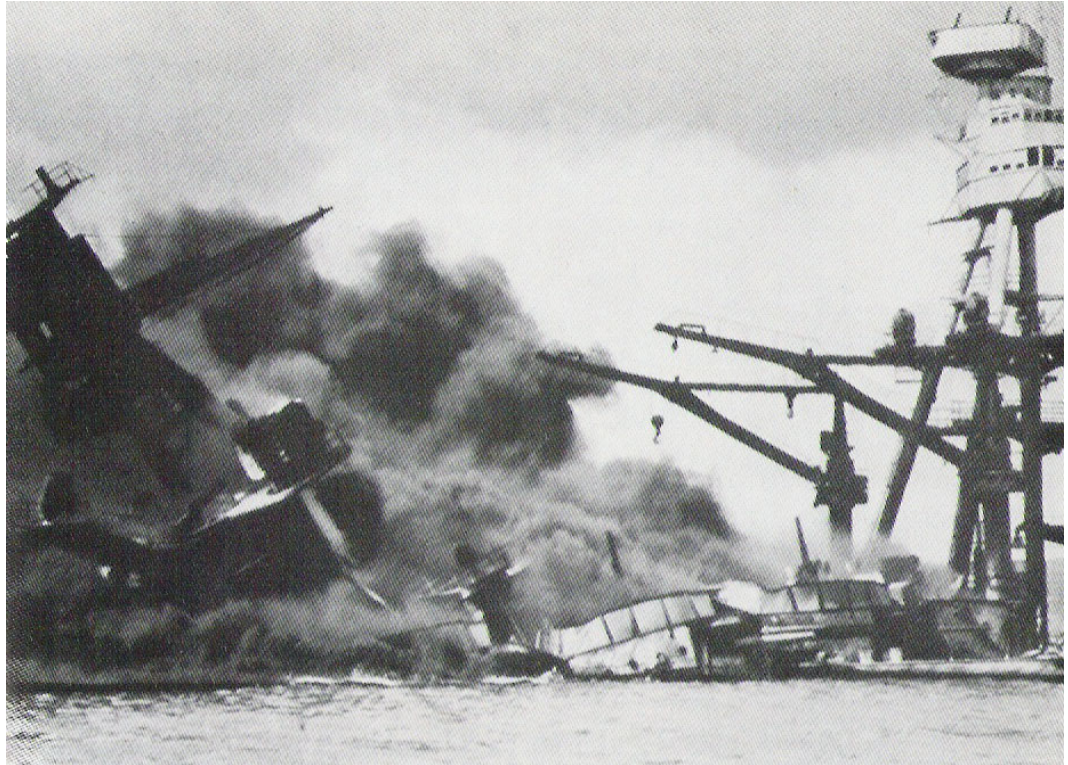
¹⁷⁰ Dower, John. War Without Mercy. New York: Pantheon. 1988. 184.

Figure 4: Occupation Propaganda¹⁷¹



¹⁷¹ Dower, John. War Without Mercy. New York: Pantheon. 1988. 186.

Figure 4: The *U.S.S. Arizona* on Fire during the Pearl Harbor Attack¹⁷²



¹⁷² Lord, Walter. Day of Infamy. New York: Henry Holt. 1957.

Figure 5: Planes Colliding with the Twin Towers¹⁷³



¹⁷³ [New York Times](#) Sep 12 2001.

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